

Clause No.7 in Report No. 10 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on May 15, 2014.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL LAND PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION
PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

Committee of the Whole recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the deputation by Susan Walmer, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust.**
- 2. Receipt of the deputation by Mark Stabb, Central Ontario Program Director, Nature Conservancy of Canada.**
- 3. Adoption of the following recommendation contained in the report dated April 24, 2014 from the Commissioner of Environmental Services:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Council with an overview of the Environmental Land Protection and Preservation Program, formerly named the Regional Greenlands Property Securement Strategy, and its achievements.

3. BACKGROUND

Committee of the Whole (September 2013) expressed interest in receiving an overview of the Environmental Land Protection and Preservation program

At the September 25, 2013 Committee of the Whole meeting, when considering the Drysdale property acquisition report, there was discussion on the Environmental Land Protection and Preservation program and process for considering candidate properties. It

was identified that an information report would be beneficial in providing an overview of the program, including its review process and criteria.

Environmental Land Protection and Preservation Program, originally the Regional Greenlands Property Securement Strategy, in place since 2001

In 2001, Council approved the Regional Greenlands Property Securement Strategy, a multi-agency program, under the umbrella of the Regional Greening Strategy, to guide the protection and enhancement of greenlands in York Region. Through the Greening Strategy refinement in 2012, the Securement Strategy was repositioned as the Environmental Land Securement action area of the Greening Strategy. The resulting Environmental Land Protection and Preservation program has been successful in protecting and enhancing the Regional Greenlands system through partnerships and leveraged resources since 2001.

Environmental land protection and preservation was further defined in the refinement of the Regional Greening Strategy in 2012

A refined Regional Greening Strategy was adopted by Council in November 2012. The goal for Environmental Land Protection and Preservation is *to protect core natural areas and restore linkages* with a target to pursue a minimum of four sites or 60 hectares of land annually. The first implementation year (2013) for the Greening Strategy refinement achieved protection of 120 hectares.

Refinement included significant public and stakeholder consultation and identified new partnership opportunities for the program. Specifically, further exploration in the areas of natural heritage trail linkages and agricultural land natural feature protection was identified. As a result, staff have been scoping opportunities and delivery options for new trail partnerships (e.g. Oak Ridges Trail Association) within the York Regional Forest and linkage areas. In addition, synergies with the agricultural community are being investigated through a pilot project with Ontario Farmland Trust to develop a summary of techniques used to protect agricultural lands, while supporting a sustainable greenlands system.

Local municipalities and conservation organizations participate in semi-annual forums hosted by York Region to communicate and collaborate on Environmental land protection and preservation

To ensure Region-wide communications and support for environmental land protection and preservation, an informed community of local municipalities and conservation partners participate in semi-annual forums hosted by York Region. Working group participants include all nine area municipalities, conservation authorities, partners (Nature Conservancy of Canada and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust), and neighbouring municipal staff from bordering municipalities. This working group provides a venue to

communicate Regional and local municipal priorities, discuss funding opportunities, learning opportunities through informative presentations, a chance to network and share upcoming projects and planning initiatives. Updates at forums have included development of the Rouge National Park, conservation authority greenlands acquisition projects, City of Vaughan's Natural Heritage Network Study, City of Markham's Environmental Land Acquisition Fund and Town of Richmond Hill's Greening the Hill environmental strategy.

Program delivery includes successful long standing partnership agreements with Nature Conservancy of Canada and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust

York Region has maintained Council endorsed partnership agreements with Nature Conservancy of Canada and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust since 2001 and 2002 respectively. Over 61 per cent of environmental lands protected through York Region Environmental Land Protection and Preservation initiatives are a result of these two strategic partnerships. Through these agreements, York Region provides base funding to help advance negotiations with land owners on protection of individual properties, with a focus on conservation easements, bequests and donations. Fee simple purchases are the last option to be considered. Agreements with not-for-profit, grass roots, credible organizations, help to achieve a high level of performance and optimize return on investment.

1,105 hectares of land protected through strategic funding partnerships since 2001

Over the past 12 years the program has been successful, and is recognized by other jurisdictions for its leadership through innovative partnerships and best practices. Since adoption of the Regional Greening Strategy in 2001, properties totalling 1,105 hectares with a combined value of \$66 million have been protected. Included in this total are 318 hectares, which are now part of the York Regional Forest. Environmental land protection and preservation achievements are summarized in Attachment 1 and the location of these properties are shown in Attachment 2.

Environmental land protection and enhancement has been achieved primarily through empowerment and support for partners already active in protecting environmental lands within the Region. York Region has contributed \$13.7 million towards \$66 million in projects for an overall York Region contribution to value at a purchase leverage ratio of 1:4. Leveraged contributions, including funds have been accessed from all levels of government, conservation authorities, foundations and individuals.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Environmental land protection and preservation supports 2010 Regional Official Plan Greenlands System objectives and policies

York Region contains some of the most significant and environmentally sensitive geological landforms in Ontario, including the Oak Ridges Moraine. In accordance with the objectives and policies of the Regional Official Plan, York Region undertakes environmental land protection and preservation focussed primarily within the Regional Greenlands System to protect and enhance lands for current and future generations. Although the majority of the System can be considered high priority for protection, lands adjacent to or connecting the Greenlands system, if protected, can enhance the Greenlands system and its functions.

Regional priorities are communicated through the Regional Official Plan and semi-annual forums with local municipalities and conservation organizations

Regional environmental land protection and preservation priorities are communicated to our partners through the Regional Official Plan and reaffirmed through semi-annual Working Group forums focussed on environmental land protection and preservation. These forums also provide participants an opportunity to share their land preservation priorities, learn about funding sources and strategic approaches.

Properties are identified for consideration through direct contact with staff, municipalities or conservation partners

While the Land Protection and Preservation Program provides direction on priority areas for protection, individual properties are brought forward through direct landowner contact with York Region staff, municipalities and conservation partners.

When an opportunity is identified and the Region is either project lead, a partner or requested to provide financial support, the property is screened through Environmental Land Protection and Preservation criteria (see Attachment 3). A variety of tools are used for conservation land protection and preservation, including bequests, donations, conservation easements, eco-gifts, partial donation and fee simple purchase. Fee simple purchase is seen as a last resort due to the high cost of land in York Region.

Environmental land screening criteria (Council 2004) and vigorous review process through Internal Evaluation Team are relevant and effective

A transparent review process with specific criteria for consideration of candidate properties was endorsed by Council in 2004. The criteria and process is strategic, defensible, unique to York Region landscapes and well supported by public and private sector conservation interests. Criteria are applied using a Natural Feature Checklist and captured on a Property Evaluation Form. Scoring takes into consideration:

- environmental attributes (e.g. greenlands protection and linkage opportunities)
- opportunities to increase forest cover consistent with the Greening Strategy tree planting objective to work toward 25 per cent Regional Official Plan forest cover target
- historical/aboriginal significance and passive recreation opportunities

Properties are then reviewed for acquisition or protection options, including bequests, donations, conservation easements, eco-gifts, partial donation and fee simple purchase. Other considerations include future maintenance costs, public access, partnership and agency support, public recreation and stewardship, and reforestation opportunities.

In 2003, an Internal Evaluation Team consisting of staff from Environmental Service, Finance, Long Range and Strategic Planning, Legal Services, and Realty Services was established to review property acquisition opportunities. This team reviews candidate properties and, as appropriate, makes a recommendation to Council.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Environmental land preservation and protection helps advance the goals and objectives of the Greening Strategy, which support the York Region Official Plan policies in the areas of: Sustainable Natural Environment, Healthy Communities, and Building Cities and Complete Communities.

Delivery of the Greening Strategy, specifically through partnerships, agreements, incentives, community engagement and financial leveraging, are consistent with the Strategic Plan fundamental principles of Economic Vitality and Good Government. The Greening Strategy is recognized as an influential document for Vision 2051 and its delivery supports seven of the eight goal areas.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Greening Strategy programs and funds are reviewed annually to ensure alignment with Regional objectives. In 2014, \$1.7 million was allocated to deliver the Greening Strategy, including land protection and preservation. Each year \$1 million is dedicated for advancement of Environmental Land Protection and Preservation program initiatives and \$700,000 supports other Greening program areas. The Greening Strategy reserve balance at 2013 year end was \$2.1 million.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

All nine local municipalities have been engaged with the Environmental Land Protection and Preservation program through individual projects and participation on the Land Securement Working Group (established in 2002). Local municipalities are able to communicate their priorities to a broad audience and often leverage interest and support for individual projects.

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Greening Strategy, including environmental land protection and preservation. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through protection and preservation initiatives, local municipalities benefit from the multiple enhancements to both their communities and the natural environment. The York Regional Forest is recognized as a prominent public amenity accessible to all York Region residents.

7. CONCLUSION

Under the Greening Strategy the Environmental Land Protection and Preservation Program is a strategic, long standing and successful program which has achieved much success since 2001. The program continues to support Regional Official Plan objectives and policies for a sustainable natural environment, including increasing forest cover, and demonstrating environmental leadership with on-the-ground action.

For more information on this report, please contact Laura McDowell, Director of Environmental Promotion and Protection at Ext. 75077 or Ian Buchanan, Manager of Natural Heritage and Forestry Ext. 75204.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

Attachments (3)

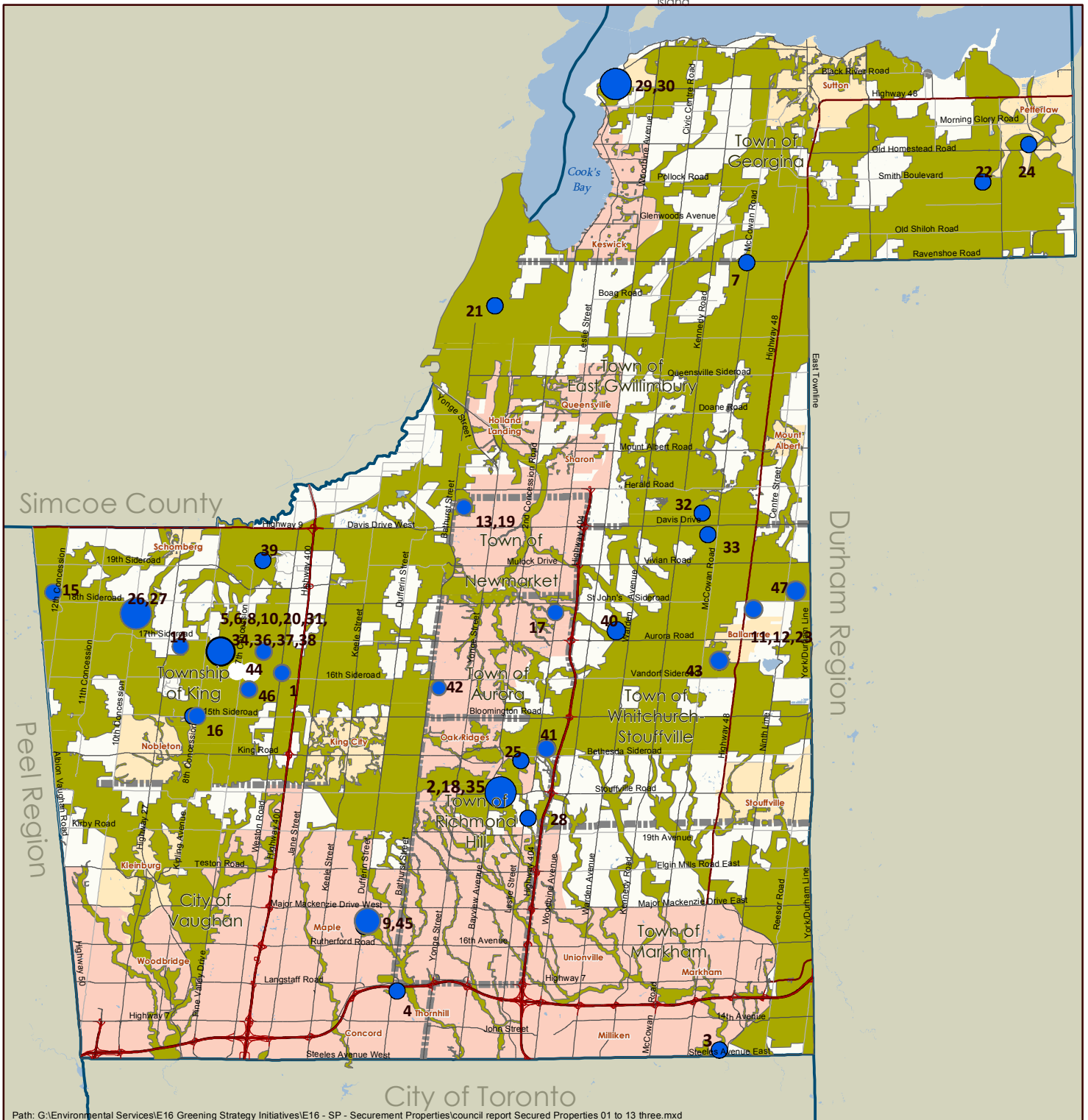
Environmental Land Protection and Preservation
2001-2013 achievements

Year	ID	Municipality	Size (ha)	Securement method	Partners	York Region contribution	Appraised value when secured
2001	1	King	9	Donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$318,000
	2	Richmond Hill	19	Purchase	TRCA with YR and RH	\$313,333	\$940,000
	3	Markham	16	Purchase	Markham with YR and TRCA	\$880,000	\$2,640,000
	4	Vaughan	32	Purchase	TRCA with YR and Vaughan	\$390,000	\$2,270,000
2002	5	King	8	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$200,000
	6	King	6	CE	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$318,000
	7	East Gwillimbury	1	Planning Act	York Region	\$0	NA
2003	8*	King		CE donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	
2004	9	Vaughan	51	Donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$15,000,000
	10	King	20	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$575,000
	11	Whitchurch-Stouffville	24	Purchase	YR with ORMLT and ORMF	\$217,000	\$525,000
	12	Whitchurch-Stouffville	1	Purchase	York Region	\$8,650	\$8,650
	13	Newmarket	4	Purchase	Newmarket with YR	\$197,750	\$2,034,000
2005	14	King	7	Bequest	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$860,000
2006	15	King	111	CE donation	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$770,000
	16	King	69	Purchase	TRCA with YR, King and ORMLT	\$1,000,000	\$3,700,000
	17	Aurora	16	Donation	ORMLT with York Region	ORMLT Agreement	\$3,340,000
	18	Richmond Hill	10	Purchase	TRCA with YR, RH and ORMF	\$250,000	\$1,000,000
	19	Newmarket/EG	17	Donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$1,100,000
	20	King	12	Donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$193,000
	21	East Gwillimbury	8	Donation	LSRCA with NCC	NCC Agreement	\$47,000
2007	22	Georgina	8	Purchase	LSRCA with NCC	NCC Agreement	\$45,000
	23	Whitchurch-Stouffville	2	Planning Act	York Region	\$0	NA
2008	24	Georgina	5	Purchase	York Region	\$83,700	\$83,700
	25	Richmond Hill	20	Purchase	TRCA with YR, RH and ORMF	\$1,200,000	\$3,400,000
	26	King	20	CE donation	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$191,250
	27	King	20	CE donation	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$172,500
	28	Richmond Hill	33	Purchase	TRCA with YR, RH, ORMF & DU	\$743,501	\$2,150,000
	29	Georgina	27	CE donation	LSRCA with NCC	\$3,900	\$385,000
	30	Georgina	55	CE donation	LSRCA with NCC	\$4,900	\$910,000
	31	King	15	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$363,000
2009	32	East Gwillimbury	121	Purchase	York Region	\$3,287,500	\$3,287,500
	33	Whitchurch-Stouffville	28	Purchase	York Region with ORMF	\$360,000	\$440,000
	34	King	29	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$1,191,908
2010	35	Richmond Hill	16	Purchase	TRCA with YR and RH	\$470,000	\$1,410,000
	36	King	22	Purchase	TRCA with NCC	NCC Agreement	\$787,350
	37	King	16	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$403,316
2011	38	King	25	Purchase	YR and ORMLT with NCC	\$703,514	\$1,407,028
	39	King	3	Purchase	LSRCA	\$8,452	\$27,555
	40	Whitchurch-Stouffville	8	Donation	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$235,000
	41	Richmond Hill	4	purchase	ORMLT	ORMLT Agreement	\$634,320
	42	Aurora	10	Purchase	Aurora with YR	\$100,000	\$700,000
	43	Whitchurch-Stouffville	13	Planning Act	YR	\$1	NA
2012	44	King	28	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$1,817,400
	45	Vaughan	16	Purchase	Vaughan with NCC	NCC Agreement	\$6,300,000
2013	**	King	36	Partial donation	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$1,684,000
	8*	King	29	Purchase	NCC	NCC Agreement	\$759,000
	47	Whitchurch-Stouffville	55	Partial donation	YR	\$1,850,640	\$2,313,300
Total lands secured (ha) 1105							
Council approved agreements (2001-2013)						\$1,618,000	
Total York Region contribution						\$13,690,841	
Total land value at purchase							\$66,936,777

*NOTE: Property # 8 was secured as a Conservation Easement in 2003 and was then purchased by NCC in 2013 to provide further protection. To avoid duplication the hectares and appraised value were not entered for 2003.

**NOTE: March 2014 Greening Achievements report reported Total Project Costs per property; Love(46) \$2,026,000, Barnett(8) \$968,000 and Drysdale(47) \$2,313,300

Acronyms: NCC - Nature Conservancy of Canada, TRCA - Toronto Region Conservation, YR-York Region, RH-Richmond Hill, ORMLT-Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, ORMF-Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, LSRCA-Lake Simcoe Region Conservation, EG-East Gwillimbury, DU-Ducks Unlimited, CE-Conservation Easement



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Environmental Land Protection & Preservation Secured Properties 2001-2013

Greening Strategy Environmental Land Protection and
Preservation Program Update. May 8, 2014



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Legend

- Urban Area
- Town or Village
- Greenlands System

- Secured properties
- # Property ID (1 - 47)

Note: Larger circles represent more than one property

Land Protection and Preservation PROPERTY SCREENING + REVIEW PROCESS

