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GREENLANDS PROPERTY SECUREMENT PEGGY'S WOODLAND TOWNS OF EAST GWILLIMBURY AND NEWMARKET

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 23, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council acknowledge the generous donation of 22 hectares of forested lands for conservation purposes by the Dunlap and Roberts families.
2. Staff be authorized to enter into discussions with the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket regarding the long-term protection and management of Peggy's Woodland.
3. Staff report back to the Transportation and Works Committee with results of the discussions with the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket on proposed options for the long-term protection and management of Peggy's Woodland.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Regional Council of the imminent securement of Peggy's Woodland (see *Attachment 1*) into Regional ownership and to seek authorization to enter into discussions with Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket regarding the ultimate protection and management of these lands.

3. BACKGROUND

In 2001, Regional Council approved the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies with an annual commitment of \$1,400,000 for their implementation. In addition to the successful delivery of a number of Greening programs and projects focusing on habitat protection and restoration, public education and promotion, information management and more, 235 hectares (580 acres) of land have been secured through donations, conservation easements, purchases and other opportunities.

As part of the Natural Greenlands Conservancy Joint Venture, York Region's securement partnership agreement with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, staff from the Nature Conservancy of Canada has been working with the Dunlap and Roberts families (owners of Peggy's Woodland) on conservation options for their lands since 2001. Earlier in 2006, the donation of the 22 hectare (54 acre) parcel from the Dunlap family to the Nature Conservancy of Canada was approved by the Federal Ecogift Panel and transfer of ownership to York Region is imminent.

The woodlands are located on the east side of Bathurst Street south of Green Lane and are partially within the Town of East Gwillimbury and partially within the Town of Newmarket (*see Attachment 1*).

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Peggy's Woodland is in close proximity to additional natural heritage lands (Holland River tributary) that the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket are protecting through the land use planning process. This north-south natural corridor will provide a significant opportunity for natural heritage protection and public passive use and enjoyment. Protection and management of Peggy's Woodland by the local municipalities is logical as they will be managing additional natural heritage lands in the area.

The Region's Internal Evaluation Team (IET) for securement initiatives consider this acquisition a strategic Greenlands opportunity. The securement of Peggy's Woodland, through a donation under the Joint Venture with the Nature Conservancy of Canada is considered a significant achievement.

The securement of this woodland is a significant Greening achievement for York Region and presents a further opportunity for York Region to partner with East Gwillimbury and Newmarket on a potential arrangement for the long-term protection and management of these lands. Options to be considered include management by agreement, long-term lease or land transfer to the local municipalities (in consultation with the staff from the Federal Ecogift Program).

4.1 Public Promotion of the Securement of Peggy's Woodland

Staff is working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket and the donors on a public announcement celebrating this successful securement achievement. The event will likely include the unveiling of a sign recognizing the donors for their significant ecological donation and recognition of the conservation partners for the efforts put forward to see this land secured for future generations. The donors will be invited back to Regional Council subsequent to the transfer of title to the Region to be formally acknowledged by York Region for their charitable gesture.

4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Region's Greening and Securement Strategies continue to support Vision 2026 and such key goal statements as:

"In 2026, York Region residents will continue to value and embrace the Region's unique natural heritage (land, air, water) and cultural heritage (sites and buildings important to our history, faiths and cultures)."

"In 2026, York Region will have grown at a pace that supports healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment and effective human services."

The Strategies strengthen the Region's commitment to focus on Vision 2026 action areas including:

- Protecting sensitive features such as forests, watersheds, the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe.
- Promoting a permanent linked Greenlands system.
- Continuing to develop and build strategies for a green Region, such as the York Regional Forest Management Plan, the Greening Strategy and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.
- Taking a leadership role in the development and implementation of environmental strategies and conservation activities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In April 2001, Council approved the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy – A Legacy for our Future. This approval included the establishment of the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve with annual contributions of \$1,400,000 from 2003 on, phased in over 2001 and 2002. As of August 1, 2006, the current balance of the Property Greenlands Securement Reserve is \$4,900,000.

The acquisition of Peggy's Woodland was achieved through a fee simple donation by the Dunlap family. Accordingly there were no significant acquisition expenditures. Administrative costs (±\$10,000) to facilitate the donation (legal fees, surveying, appraisals, etc.) were covered through the approved Greening Strategy funding of the Natural Greenlands Conservancy Joint Venture with the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Annual operating costs are estimated to be no more than \$1,000 - \$2,000, considerably less if managed by the local municipalities in conjunction with other natural heritage lands in the area that they acquire through the land use planning process. Details regarding ongoing operating costs will be discussed with the local municipalities when discussing long-term protection and management options.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Securement Strategy. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through securement initiatives, local municipalities benefit from the multiple enhancements to both their communities and the natural environment. Potential protection and management options with the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket may result in additional benefits to them as these lands could be consolidated with additional natural heritage lands in the area being protected and acquired through the land use planning process.

7. CONCLUSION

The Internal Evaluation Team (IET) for Securement Initiatives has considered this donation through the Nature Conservancy of Canada Joint Venture agreement with York Region. The acquisition of Peggy's Woodland, through donation, is considered a significant securement achievement. Logical management of the lands would lie with the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket. As such, their interest in managing these lands will be pursued.

For more information on this report, contact Sandra Malcic, Regional Greening Co-ordinator of the Transportation and Works Department or Diane Pomeroy, Senior Planner of the Planning and Economic Development Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)