

Clause 4 in Report No. 17 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on November 17, 2016.

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## York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Update

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendation contained in the report dated October 28, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:

1. Council receive this report for information.

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Report dated October 28, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner now follows:

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that Council receive this report for information.

2. Purpose

This report addresses Council's request during the April 14, 2016 Committee of the Whole meeting that York Region staff provide a follow-up report on the collaborative efforts of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and York Region.

3. Background and Previous Council Direction

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was established to provide advice on the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming in the Region

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The group is similar to agricultural advisory committees that have been established in the

Regions of Halton, Peel and Durham. It is currently made up of seven members representing:

- Holland Marsh Growers Association
- York Federation of Agriculture
- York Farm Fresh Association
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
- Markham and East York Agricultural Society
- York Region Food Network
- Regional Municipality of York

Two York Region Planning and Economic Development staff also provide administrative and procedural support to the Liaison Group.

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group requested additional resources from York Region in support of Agricultural and Agri-Food initiatives

On April 14, 2016 Committee of the Whole received a staff report updating the activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group throughout 2015 and planned initiatives for 2016. This is captured in [Clause 5 of Report No. 7 of Committee of the Whole](#); received by Council on April 21, 2016.

During this meeting the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group made a deputation presentation requesting that the Region dedicate staff and budget to support agricultural initiatives.

The presentation was received by Committee and Regional Staff were asked to arrange a meeting with the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group as soon as possible and to provide a follow-up report to Committee of the Whole in Q4 of 2016 updating Council on the status of these requests.

#### 4. Analysis and Implications

Discussions have taken place to identify Regional Agricultural priorities and how best to move forward

Following the April 14, 2016 Committee of the Whole meeting, York Region staff hosted a meeting on April 19, 2016 with members of the York Region Agricultural

Advisory Liaison Group and Economic Development personnel from local municipalities. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the list of requests made by the Group to Committee of the Whole, set priorities and determine how best to move forward. These requests included:

1. Completing a Regional Agricultural and Agri-Food Strategy
2. Completing a Business Retention and Expansion survey of primary producers and processors across York Region
3. Developing and implementing a Marketing Strategy for Local Food – begin to build a local food system within the Region
4. Providing educational workshops for industry stakeholders
5. Conducting an industry tour for Elected officials and staff from York Region and the local municipalities
6. Dedicated staff resources for Agriculture and Agri-Food initiatives

Various options were discussed and considered in the context of available budget and resources, resulting in the following outcomes:

Developing a York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy is the first priority to guide future program development

It was agreed that there is an opportunity to develop a York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy to guide future policy development, initiatives and resource allocation decisions. During the May 9, 2016 York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group meeting, the matter of a Request For Proposals (RFP) to hire a consultant to lead the development of a York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy was discussed. An RFP was created by York Region Planning and Economic Development staff with input from Liaison Group members and released in October 2016. A consultant will be engaged by December, 2016. The project is scheduled to be completed for Committee and Council's consideration in early 2017.

The objectives of creating a plan are:

- Support York Region's agricultural and food production sectors
- Gain an understanding of the economic impact of the agriculture sector in York Region
- Identify agricultural and Agri-food sub-sectors with the greatest potential for creating and sustaining employment and investment in the agricultural industry in York Region

- Identify possible policy and process changes to support agriculture and agri-food in York Region
- Identify gaps, key areas and recommend actions for York Region to make an impact in supporting the growth of the agriculture and agri-food sector

When developed, the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy will articulate a comprehensive set of goals and therefore guide York Region's future efforts to support the agriculture industry.

A York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy is supported by various approved Regional plans

The mandate and activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group, are supported by the following Regional Council-approved plans:

- Vision 2051: the 'A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System' goal area
- York Region Official Plan – 2010: Chapter 6, Agricultural and Rural Areas
- 2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan: strategic priority area – 'Manage Environmentally Sustainable Growth' and 'Strengthening the Region's Economy'
- SM4RT Living Plan: Food Waste Reduction Strategy – Good Food Program, which promotes buying local farm fresh food to help residents gain a better connection and appreciation for their food and discourages food waste

The Business Retention and Expansion Survey work will await the outcomes of the Strategy review

During the May 9, 2016 York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group meeting it was agreed that it would be premature to commence a Business Retention and Expansion Survey prior to the completion of a Regional Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy. As a result, this initiative has been postponed until the plan is complete.

The recently completed Marketing Strategy for Local Food findings will be incorporated into the overall Strategy review

In January 2016 York Region Planning and Economic Development staff facilitated the formation of a York Region Farm Fresh Market Study Working Group and supported the hiring of a consultant to develop recommendations for promoting local food growers, producers and retailers across York Region. The

Working Group and hiring and ongoing management of the consultant were led by the York Region Federation of Agriculture. The Federation of Agriculture is a membership-based organization comprised of over 700 farm businesses located throughout York Region and Toronto, including the farmers in the Rouge National Urban Park.

This work was completed in June 2016 and included recommendations which will be considered during the development of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy.

Educational Workshops for industry stakeholders will continue

York Region Small Business Enterprise Centre staff worked with staff from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Affairs to develop and host a social media training workshop for local Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry operators. This event is scheduled to take place on November 28, 2016.

An Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry Tour will be deferred to allow a focus on the priorities in 2016

During the September 7, 2016 York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group meeting it was suggested by the membership that an Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry Tour not take place in 2016. The rationale was that the Region has already hosted similar tours in 2014 and 2015 and the preference is to focus resources on other activities.

Dedicated resources for Agriculture and Agri-Food initiatives are under consideration

York Region Planning and Economic Development staff has submitted a Business Case to Senior Management to secure a dedicated Agricultural-focused staff position and additional resources to be added later in the next term of council. In the meantime Planning and Economic Development staff will continue to support efforts and initiatives with available resources.

## 5. Financial Implications

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group receives support from staff in the Planning and Economic Development Branch of the Corporate Services Department. Staff and administrative support costs are included in the approved 2016 Planning and Economic Development Branch budget. \$30,000 has also been set aside in the 2016 Planning and Economic Development budget to complete the Agriculture & Agri-food Strategy.

## 6. Local Municipal Impact

The mandate of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group supports and complements the goals and interests of all the Region's municipal partners. Given these shared interests, staff from some local municipalities have attended Liaison Group meetings and all local municipalities will continue to be advised of and afforded the opportunity to be engaged in the initiatives undertaken by the Liaison Group.

## 7. Conclusion

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The Liaison Group requested additional resources from York Region in support of Agricultural and Agri-Food initiatives. Discussions have taken place to identify Regional Agricultural priorities and how best to move forward.

It has been agreed that developing a Regional Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy is the top priority and that future initiatives will flow from this blueprint.

For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

October 28, 2016

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.