
REPORT TITLE: **Greenlands Securement Program Funding Pilot Results and Program Update**

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works
 Adrian Smith, Chief Planner and Director of Regional Planning and Growth Management

RECOMMENDATION

That the Greenlands Securement Program pilot project, which increases the Regional funding cost share to 70 per cent, be extended for an additional three years commencing June 28, 2021;

And further, that the current requirement stating that the pilot project be suspended if the Greenlands Securement Reserve is reduced to \$2.0 million be waived during the extended period;

And further, that the Regional Chair, on behalf of Regional Council, write to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Minister of Natural Resources, as well as the provincial Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to request the reinstatement of adequate federal/provincial funding for greenlands securement to municipalities and conservation authorities while continuing to provide funding for land trusts;

And further, that the report of the Commissioner of Public Works and Chief Planner and Director of Regional Planning and Growth Management, listed on the June 10, 2021 Regional Council, titled “Greenlands Securement Program Funding Pilot Results and Program Update”, be circulated to the Town of Caledon, Cities of Brampton and Mississauga, Credit Valley Conservation, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Bruce Trail Conservancy and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, for information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Peel Greenlands Securement Program (the “Program”) has been in operation since 2005, operating under the Council approved Peel Greenlands Securement Program Implementation Guidelines (the “Guidelines”).
- The Program is administered by an internal staff working group that reviews and evaluates project applications in accordance with the Guidelines, internal procedures, and Regional policy.
- In 2018, a pilot project allowed for a temporary adjustment of the Regional cost share funding formula from 50 percent to 70 percent over a three year period or until the Greenlands Securement Reserve fund (the “Reserve”) is reduced to \$2.0 million, whichever occurs first, to support improvement of Program outcomes.
- In 2019, Regional staff met with Credit Valley Conservation (the “CVC”) and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (the “TRCA”) to identify pre-application process improvements for complex land securement projects.

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- Guideline updates, process improvements and the pilot project have resulted in the successful securement of five properties.
 - The pilot project concludes on June 28, 2021. Staff recommend that this pilot be extended with modified terms for a further period of three years.
 - Staff recommend continued advocacy to the Federal and Provincial Governments for reinstatement of land securement funding accessible to municipalities and conservation authorities in Peel Region while continuing to provide funding for land trusts.
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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Regional Council approved changes to the Greenlands Securement Program Guidelines including the commencement of a three-year funding pilot that adjusted Regional cost share funding to 70 percent with direction for Regional staff to report back on results. This report provides results of the Program improvements and pilot project implemented in 2018 with a recommendation to extend the funding pilot and continue advocacy to the Federal and Provincial Government for further greenlands securement funding support.

BACKGROUND

1. Greenlands Securement Program

The Program started as a pilot project in 2005 with the establishment of the Reserve and associated capital project. The Guidelines were initially approved in 2007 and revised by Regional Council in 2011, 2016 and 2018. Further details on the Program is provided in Appendix I.

To implement the Program, the Region has entered into Greenlands Securement Agreements (the “Agreements”) with the TRCA, CVC, Bruce Trail Conservancy, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Town of Caledon, City of Brampton, and is in the process of finalizing an agreement with the City of Mississauga. Organizations having formal Agreements with the Region are recognized as Conservation Partners (the “Partners”) by the Program.

Working with the Partners, the initial pilot project has developed into successful funding under the Program that has provided permanent protection for 533 hectares (1,317 acres) of ecologically significant and sensitive features and areas in Peel (see Appendix II), as well as opportunities for stewardship and education. In many cases, secured properties provide opportunities for public access to natural areas to promote understanding and appreciation of the natural environment. Additional securement opportunities continue to be pursued.

FINDINGS

1. 2018 Implementation Guidelines Update and Pilot Project

a) Background

In June 2018 through Council Resolution 2018-604, Regional Council approved updating the Guidelines to address Partners’ concerns regarding access to funding under the Program. These updates to the Guidelines included expanding Program funding to

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enable acquisition of lands that provide the opportunity to protect, restore or enhance natural heritage areas and linkages to be funded; the addition of a review and resolution process to the Appraisal Procedures; and inclusion of consent fees as an eligible Program cost.

Partners also identified challenges in obtaining the matching 50 percent cost share funding as a result of limited private or federal and provincial funding programs. In response to limited matching funding availability for projects in Peel, the Program funding formula was amended to increase the Regional cost share up to 70 percent and to reduce the Partner cost share to thirty percent (30%) to recognize challenges Partners were incurring in obtaining matching funding.

The changes to the Program were implemented as a pilot project over a three-year period or until the Reserve was reduced to \$2.0 million, whichever occurred first. The implementation of the pilot project, as opposed to a permanent change to the funding limits outright, was intended to allow staff to evaluate the effectiveness of an adjusted funding formula over time. This pilot project funding formula expires on June 28, 2021.

b) Assessment and Results of Pilot Project

The pilot project has resulted in the successful completion of five securement projects from 2018-2021 at a cost to the Region of \$1,763,327. These projects permanently protect 111 hectares (274 acres) of ecologically significant features and areas in Peel including 68 hectares (168 acres) of core greenlands. The securement projects include four properties in the Town of Caledon and one in the City of Brampton. TRCA and CVC each acquired one property while Bruce Trail Conservancy acquired two. The fifth property was acquired by the City of Brampton (see Appendix III). The lands acquired include properties located on the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine.

The aforementioned land securements protect main valley sections in both the Credit and Humber River Valleys and include provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlands, species at risk and Ecologically Significant Areas. All of the properties acquired are adjacent to existing public lands, expand existing Conservation Areas or provide opportunities for public access. Where appropriate, the properties provide opportunities for future public access to the Bruce Trail and Credit Valley Trail.

The Reserve has been supported with an annual contribution of \$750,000 through the Regional budgeting process, as approved in Resolution 2010-810. The balance of the Reserve as of March 31, 2021 is \$8.0 million. The balance of the Reserve at the beginning of the pilot project in June 2018 was \$7.0 million. At no point during this pilot project was the Reserve drawn down to the threshold of \$2.0 million.

Staff recommend that the adjustment of the funding formula from 50 percent to 70 percent continue for an additional three years. The extension of the 70 percent cost share will enable Partners to continue acquiring ecological properties within Peel. This is especially important given that there is still limited federal and provincial funding for land securement projects for Partners to fund the remaining 50 percent land securement costs. Staff will report back to Regional Council on the results of this extended pilot project at its completion in 2024.

Staff recommend waiving the requirement for suspension of the pilot project during the extended period if at any time the Reserve is drawn down to \$2.0 million. Currently

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there are individual higher value projects in progress that will have the potential to draw the Reserve below \$2.0 million. Waiving this limitation would avoid a risk that the pilot extension would be suspended in its early stages and would also provide the potential to support a larger number of projects over the pilot period than might otherwise be possible if the current \$2.0 million threshold is retained.

In accordance with the Guidelines, staff may seek Regional Council approval to approve a Partner's application to cover up to 100 percent of the required funding if appropriating funding independent of the Program continues to be a challenge in specific cases. In such cases, the Guidelines require Partners to demonstrate that best efforts have been made to leverage Regional funding to obtain matching funding from outside agencies and to consider options in the design of securement projects to reduce the Region's funding share.

2. Pre-Application Process Improvements

a) Background

In addition to implementing the 2018 Guidelines and pilot project, Regional staff met with staff from CVC and TRCA in 2019 to discuss the challenges Partners were facing when accessing Regional funding for complex land securement projects. Consequently, several pre-application process improvements were developed that have been implemented over the past two years.

The improvements to the pre-application review process to improve efficiency and processing of funding requests include:

- i. Screening project for landowner interest early in project development;
- ii. Developing a clear project proposal;
- iii. Confirming regulatory and land use planning permissions prior to appraisal;
- iv. Clarifying Official Plan and Zoning By-law Provisions to support conservation severances;
- v. Partners to obtain independent legal advice;
- vi. Consulting with Regional Real Estate staff early to obtain agreement on appraisal terms of reference prior to retaining an appraiser;
- vii. For complex land securement projects consulting with Regional Executive Leadership Team for feedback and direction early in the process; and
- viii. Following and implementing the Program Guidelines.

b) Assessment and Results

Implementation of these eight pre-application steps has assisted in Program funding applications being submitted by Partners in a timely manner with greater certainty and communication amongst Region and Partner staff. Staff from the Region and Conservation Authorities met with local municipal staff to draft conservation severance policy recommendations for the Peel 2041+ Regional Official Plan update and Town of Caledon Official Plan Update and By-law Review and are available for implementation by all local municipalities. It is recommended that these process improvements continue to be implemented, improved, and reviewed every three years, or more frequently, as new information for improvements becomes available.

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3. Advocacy

a) Background

As a result of government funding being discontinued or reallocated to land trusts, there is a need to advocate to the Federal and Provincial Governments to reinstate land securement funding opportunities for municipalities and conservation authorities while continuing to fund securement for land trusts.

b) Assessment and Results

In 2018 Council agreed to advocate to the Federal and Provincial Governments to reinstate funding for municipalities and conservation authorities for greenlands securement, while continuing to provide funding for land trusts. A letter was sent to the Federal and Provincial Governments from the Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer in this regard. A recommendation regarding further advocacy to senior levels of government to reinstate funding is included in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While it is being recommended that the Region's portion of the funding cost share be increased from 50 percent of eligible costs to 70 percent of eligible costs for an additional three years, there are no additional funds being requested as part of this proposal. Sufficient funding is available in the Reserve for projects that have been earmarked for funding in 2021 and will be drawn upon, as required, during this pilot period. The annual funding contribution to the Reserve of \$750,000 is built into the budget base and carries over from year to year.

The above budgeting for earmarked projects has considered the potential that unique strategic project funding requirements may require larger draws from the Reserve that would potentially reduce the funding balance available to future projects that are not currently earmarked for funding. Such strategic opportunities are being pursued. Staff continue to manage the Reserve balance and project funding priorities in consultation with Partners.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommend that Council increase the Region's funding cost share for the Program from 50 percent of eligible costs to 70 percent of eligible costs for an additional three years. Staff recommend that the Region advocate to the Federal and Provincial Governments to reinstate funding for municipalities and conservation authorities for greenlands securement, while continuing to provide funding for land trusts. Subject to Council direction on the recommendations, Staff will report back to Regional Council at the end of the three years on the outcomes of the advocacy and pilot project.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Greenlands Securement Program Background

Appendix II - Greenlands Securement Program Funded Properties

Appendix III - Greenlands Securement Program Properties Funded Under 2018 Pilot

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For further information regarding this report, please contact Adrian Smith, RPP, Chief Planner and Director, Regional Planning and Growth Management, (905) 791-7800 x4047 or adrian.smith@peelregion.ca.

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