
REPORT TITLE: Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group Update 2019-2020 and Related Initiatives

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

That the revised Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group ('PAAWG') Terms of Reference attached as Appendix III in the report of the Commissioner of Public Works, listed on the May 27, 2021 Regional Council agenda, titled "Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group Update 2019-2020 and Related Initiatives", be approved;

And further, that the ALUS Peel Pilot Project ('Pilot Project') be endorsed, in principle;

And further, that the Commissioner of Public Works be authorized to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with ALUS Canada, Credit Valley Conservation ('CVC') and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority ('TRCA') to implement the Pilot Project subject to ALUS Canada confirming funding and CVC and TRCA Board endorsement of the Pilot Project, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Public Works and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor;

And further, that the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance's ('Alliance') request for annual funding of \$30,000 be extended an additional five years from 2022 to 2026 to implement strategic projects of the 'Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021-2026', subject to the annual budget approvals process;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be circulated to the Town of Caledon; City of Brampton; City of Mississauga; the Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara and York; the Cities of Hamilton and Toronto; the Ministries of Agriculture and Food, Rural Affairs, and Municipal Affairs and Housing; Credit Valley Conservation; Toronto and Region Conservation Authority; and, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, for information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2019-2020 the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group:
 - Reviewed and commented on Peel 2041+ draft policies and mapping;
 - Approved Peel Rural Water Quality Program grants totalling \$212,094 supporting 31 on-farm stewardship projects and leveraging an additional \$179,273 in funding;
 - Assisted in the development of the ALUS Peel Pilot Project concept and endorsed revisions to the PAAWG Terms of Reference; and
 - Provided input to the updating of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021-2026.

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- Peel Region has worked with ALUS Canada, the CVC and TRCA to develop plans for an ALUS Peel Pilot Project that would complement the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program, increasing support for on-farm environmental stewardship projects at no additional cost to the Region. Subject to Regional Council endorsement, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed to formalize working arrangements among the partner organizations.
 - The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance and the Region of Peel continue to collaborate on agriculture and agri-food initiatives relevant to the Region. In 2020 the Alliance completed a major review of its Action Plan and adopted a new Action Plan for 2021 to 2026.
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DISCUSSION

1) Background

The Region of Peel recognizes the contributions of the agricultural sector to the local economy, to environmental conservation and to the cultural heritage of the Region. In 1997, the Region established the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group (“PAAWG”) to act as an advisory body to Regional Council and to build closer connections to the farming community. A 2020 study by the Greenbelt Foundation found that such advisory bodies play an important role helping to facilitate the exchange of information between municipalities and the agricultural sector and a better understanding of the issues facing farmers.

This report provides a summary of PAAWG’s activities in 2019 and 2020. It also:

- Outlines a proposal to build on the existing Peel Rural water Quality Program (PRWQP) through a partnership with ALUS Canada;
- Proposes revisions to the PAAWG Terms of Reference to enable PAAWG to play a central role in the ALUS Peel Pilot Project; and
- Provides an update on the activities of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (“the Alliance”) and recommends that Peel Region continue its financial support for the Alliance.

2) Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group

The Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group is appointed by Council to assist the Region in protecting agricultural lands and supporting the agricultural industry in Peel. Its membership consists of three Regional or Area Municipal Councillors plus nine additional members representing a range of agricultural interests in Peel. The Working Group continued to work during Covid-19, holding virtual meetings.

The Working Group keeps the Region informed of issues and concerns of the agricultural community and provides the agricultural sector with an opportunity to learn about and provide input to Regional initiatives. PAAWG plays a major role in providing input to the Regional Official Plan and contributes to the Region’s efforts to achieve its agricultural goals, objectives and policies.

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a) 2019-2020 Programs and Projects

i) Peel 2041+ Regional Official Plan Review

PAAWG was provided with regular updates on the Official Plan Review. It received presentations and provided comments on:

- Agricultural and Rural Systems Policies and Mapping;
- Greenlands System Policies and Mapping; and
- The Settlement Area Boundary Expansion Study (SABE), with a focus on the Agricultural Impact Assessment component of the Study.

ii) Peel Rural Water Quality Program

The Region, in partnership with Credit Valley Conservation (“CVC”) and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (“TRCA”), has implemented the Peel Rural Water Quality Program (the “Program”) since 2004. The Program provides technical and financial resources to farmers to encourage stewardship focused on protecting and enhancing water quality and the natural environment. The Working Group is the approval authority for grant applications submitted under the Program.

During 2019-2020, the Working Group approved approximately \$212,094 in grants supporting the implementation of 31 voluntary farm stewardship projects. The grants leveraged an additional \$179, 273 from project proponents and funders to help complete these projects. The projects included tree planting, natural area enhancement and creation; nutrient management; manure storage; chemical storage; and livestock fencing to protect watercourses and other environmentally sensitive features. Appendices I and II provide more information about the Program’s accomplishments.

iii) Grown in Peel

The Grown in Peel Local Food Guide (the “Guide”) has been published by the Region since 2006. It is a joint initiative of the Regional Planning and Growth Management Division and Peel’s Healthy Eating Team within the Region’s Health Services Department.

The Guide is a local food marketing initiative to promote local agriculture, connect residents to the farmers who produce their food, and increase residents’ access to safe, healthy and affordable food in Peel Region. The Guide displays information about participating Farms and Farmers’ Markets, lists the products sold at each Farm and Farmer’s Market, and provides information about healthy eating.

The distribution of the Guide has been paused since March 2020 due to COVID-19 redeployments. Regional planning staff will be evaluating the potential to re-launch the Guide for the 2022 publication year.

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iv) Other Topics

The following are additional topics that were reviewed by PAAWG for discussion and comments.

- (1) Provincial Policy Statement Update;
- (2) Peel Food Action Plan;
- (3) Conservation Authority Natural Heritage System for the Region of Peel;
- (4) GTA West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment;
- (5) Proposed Changes to the Provincial *Drainage Act*;
- (6) Provincial *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, Bill 156*; and
- (7) Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) Action Plan Update.

b) Update to PAAWG Terms of Reference

In 2020, the PAAWG Terms of Reference were reviewed and updated to enable the Working Group to play a significant role in the ALUS Peel Pilot Project as discussed below. In addition, a number of housekeeping changes were made. The proposed modifications to the PAAWG Terms of Reference have been endorsed by the Working Group. A copy of the updated Terms of Reference is attached as Appendix III.

c) 2021 PAAWG Work Plan

The following action items remain as priorities in the work plan for 2021:

Policy Research, Development and Monitoring

- Peel 2041+ Regional Official Plan Review and implementation;
- Provincial Consultation on Agricultural Impact Assessment Guidelines;
- Peel Food Charter and Peel Food Action Council; and
- Town of Caledon Official Plan Review.

Policy and Program Implementation

- Review and approval of Peel Rural Water Quality Program funding applications;
- Review and provide advice on implementation of the ALUS Peel Pilot Project;
- Participate in and provide advice on the Grown in Peel program; and
- Participate in action items identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan.

Regional Projects and Initiatives

- Review and comment on proposed Regional capital infrastructure development projects and initiatives.

Communication and Outreach

- Assist in developing Peel Region farm tours and other communication and outreach initiatives.

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3) ALUS Peel Pilot Project

a) Background

ALUS Canada is a Canadian non-profit organization that works with farmers to restore and enhance the natural environment on their farms providing cleaner air, cleaner water, carbon sequestration, erosion control, flood mitigation, pollinator support and wildlife habitat. ALUS Canada accomplishes this by supporting local, community-led programs in which farmers play a critical role.

ALUS Canada originated in 2000 and is active in six provinces stretching from Prince Edward Island to Alberta. It is well regarded in the agricultural community. Currently there are ALUS projects in eight Ontario communities, though none in the Golden Horseshoe.

ALUS Canada shares many of the goals of the Peel Rural Water Quality Program (PRWQP) and embodies many of the same operating principles. Like the PRWQP, ALUS focuses on supporting voluntary stewardship among farmers, with farmers playing a key role in designing and delivering the program at the community level. ALUS is unique, though, in providing annual payments to farmers for the provision of ecological restoration and enhancement on their farmland.

b) Proposed Pilot Project

Peel Region, in partnership with CVC and the TRCA, has worked with ALUS Canada to develop an ALUS Canada Pilot Project in Peel. This project would be the first of its kind in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, reflecting the Region's leadership in supporting the environmental stewardship work of farmers. The Pilot Project is supported by PAAWG.

A three-year pilot project is proposed that would build on and complement the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program. ALUS Canada would provide additional funding to support environmental stewardship projects carried out by farmers on their lands and thus increase the potential uptake of environmental restoration and enhancement projects by farmers in Peel. The focus would be on lands that are marginally productive, inefficient to farm, and/or environmentally sensitive.

It is proposed that Council authorize staff to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with ALUS Canada, Credit Valley Conservation and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for the ALUS Peel Pilot Project. The MOU would embody the following principles:

- The Pilot Project will be an extension to the existing PRWQP, adding value to the existing program and providing national recognition;
- Communication materials used to publicize the Project will recognize ALUS as a supplement to the PRWQP;
- The Pilot will be locally led and managed within the guidelines set by ALUS Canada;
- PAAWG will play a key role in advising on implementation of the Project and will be responsible for reviewing and approving applications from individual farmers for funding;
- ALUS Canada providing annual base funding for the Pilot Project of approximately \$75,000 per year. The funding provided by ALUS Canada will, at a minimum, cover

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the costs of the annual payments to farmers and the administrative costs above and beyond those related to administration of the PWQRP. The Pilot will not result in additional costs to Peel Region or the Conservation Authorities; and

- The partners will evaluate the efficacy, benefits and costs of the Pilot and may extend the Pilot beyond the initial three-year term.

c) Implementation/Next Steps

If the Pilot Project is supported by Regional Council, the CVC and the TRCA the MOU then will be signed by the parties. The next steps then will address implementation:

1. With PAAWG's participation, developing Project guidelines addressing for example, what types of farmer-initiated projects will be eligible for funding; and
2. Establishing procedures for project administration.

4) Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (the GHFFA) was formed in 2012 as a partnership among the Regional Municipalities and Federations of Agriculture in the Golden Horseshoe and the single tier municipalities of Hamilton and Toronto. The Alliance also includes representation from other stakeholders such as the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Greenbelt Foundation and colleges and universities with an interest in agriculture and food. Councillor Downey currently serves as the Chair of the Alliance.

In 2012 the Alliance released the "Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021". The Action Plan identified pathways for a more integrated and coordinated approach to food and farming viability in the area to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retained, enhanced and expanded its role as a leading food and farming cluster. The Alliance approach enables the partners to share resources, knowledge and experience and respond to agricultural issues from a broader regional food and agricultural system perspective and with a common voice.

Each municipal partner has supported the Alliance and the implementation of the Action Plan through in-kind staff time and a financial contribution of \$30,000 per year. The funding provided by the municipal partners assists in leveraging provincial and other funding to implement the Action Plan. Through this collaboration, the Region is able to cost-share and leverage resources on projects having greater impact to the Region and the regional agricultural system. In 2018 Regional Council endorsed a request that Peel Region provide \$30,000 per year for three years to the Alliance to implement strategic projects. This funding helped support renewal of the Alliance's Action Plan which has identified new priorities for 2021 to 2026.

a) Accomplishments 2019-2020

Incorporation

From 2012 to 2018 the Alliance operated under the auspices of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). In 2018 the Authority made the decision to incorporate as a not-for-profit organization. The first year of operations under this new model was 2019.

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Implementation of the “Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021”

During 2019 and 2020 the Alliance undertook the following in support of the Action Plan:

- Consulted on and made significant contributions respecting the changes to the Provincial Policy Statement and the *Conservation Authorities Act*;
- In response to the potential closing or relocation of the Ontario Food Terminal, the Alliance and the City of Toronto commissioned the Canadian Urban Institute to make recommendations for the modernization of the terminal;
- Completed Years One and Two of a Research Project with the University of Guelph to assess the Economic Impact of Purchasing of Local Food in Long Term Care Homes;
- Added new partners and data points to ConnectOn mapping and data base of agri-food assets for use in planning and economic development to support the economic viability and employment growth in the local food sector. This included continued partnership with the Trillium Manufacturing Network to integrate manufacturing with farm sector data in the database;
- In conjunction with the Holland Marsh Growers, completed a Carrot Value Chain Study identified the flow of Ontario Grown Carrots domestically and as they were exported;
- Continued sharing of best practices in Economic Development and Planning with staff members of the partner municipalities;
- Facilitated information exchange on adaptation to COVID-19;
- Hosted a webinar, “A Path to A Resilient and Vibrant Future”, exploring key actions to support the continued growth of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Cluster; and
- Collaborated in developing “Always in Season”, a toolkit for communities to support the agri-food sector.

b) Action Plan Update 2021-2026

In 2020 the Alliance developed a new Action Plan to guide the Alliance over the next five years, from 2021 to 2026. The development of the Action Plan involved extensive research into current and future trends and consultation with stakeholders. The agri-food system in the Golden Horseshoe is facing new challenges with COVID-19, unprecedented levels of food insecurity, the urgency of climate change, labour issues and supply-chain disruptions adding to the existing pressures on the system.

The new Action Plan has the following goals with priority actions attached to each:

- The GHFFA is recognized as the leading organization with expertise on food and farming issues and opportunities in the Golden Horseshoe Region of Ontario;
- Establish the Golden Horseshoe as Canada’s leading innovative agriculture and agri-food cluster; and
- Enable the agri-food cluster to support sustainability outcomes.

More detail respecting the Action Plan can be found in the Executive Summary attached as Appendix IV to this report.

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c) Regional Support

When the Alliance was formed in 2012 the Region made a commitment to provide funding to 2018. In 2018 that commitment was extended to 2021, the last year of the original Action Plan. The Alliance has requested that the partner Regions and Cities each continue to support the Alliance through an allocation of \$30,000 per year (see Appendix V). This would continue the contribution that Peel Region has made in previous years. It is recommended that Council endorse this annual allocation for the five-year term of the new Action Plan for consideration as part of the annual budget approvals process.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

There is no risk to the Region associated with the recommendations in the report. Normal due diligence provisions, including consultation with Region legal staff for drafting purposes, will be included in the MOU for the ALUS Peel Pilot Project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Peel Rural Water Quality Program, with an annual Budget of \$75,000, provides direct grants to farmers undertaking approved environmental stewardship projects funded from CVC and TRCA Special Levy projects. The ALUS Peel Pilot will not result in additional costs to Peel Region or the Conservation Authorities.

The Region has been supporting Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance through its annual operating Budget of \$30,000 since 2014. It is proposed that this funding be continued for a period of next five years from 2022 to 2026, the term of the Alliance's new Action Plan, subject to annual Regional Council Budget approvals.

CONCLUSION

The Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance facilitate and enhance relationships between the Region and agricultural groups, other municipalities and stakeholders within Peel and across the Golden Horseshoe and with the Province. Both organizations make important contributions supporting farmers and the agricultural system in Peel. The ALUS Peel Pilot Project will complement the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program, providing incentives for farmers to increase their environmental stewardship activities.

APPENDICES

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| Appendix I | Peel Rural Water Quality Program 2019 Status Report |
| Appendix II | Peel Rural Water Quality Program 2020 Status Report |
| Appendix III | Updated Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group Terms of Reference |
| Appendix IV | Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Action Plan 2021-26 – Summary |
| Appendix V | Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Funding Request |

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For further information regarding this report, please contact Adrian Smith, Director and Chief Planner, Ext. 4047, adrian.smith@peelregion.ca.

Authored By: Don Campbell, Principal Planner.

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner, Division Director, Financial Support Unit and Legal Services.