
For Information

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

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group, the Peel Rural Water Quality Program, the Alternative Land Use System Peel Pilot, Grown in Peel Local Food Guide and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2021 the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group:
 - Reviewed and commented on the Regional Official Plan Peel 2051 draft policies and mapping;
 - Approved Peel Rural Water Quality Program grants totaling \$47,600 supporting 10 on-farm stewardship projects and leveraging an additional \$95,000 in funding; and,
 - Assisted in the development of the Alternative Land Use System (ALUS) Peel Pilot Project and program guidelines.
 - In 2022, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Region of Peel, ALUS Canada, Credit Valley Conservation and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority was signed, launching the ALUS Peel Pilot which will complement the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program, increasing support for on-farm environmental stewardship projects at no additional cost to the Region.
 - 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.
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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.

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This report provides summaries of PAAWG's activities in 2021, the Peel Rural Water Quality Program ("PRWQP"), the Alternative Land Use Services Peel Pilot ("ALUS Peel"), which launched in 2022, the Grown in Peel local food guide and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance ("GHFFA"), which is supported with funding from the Region of Peel and other partners.

2. Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group

PAAWG 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 Local Municipal Councillors plus nine additional members representing a range of agricultural interests in Peel. PAAWG continued its regular schedule of meeting during COVID-19, holding virtual meetings.

PAAWG 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. The Working Group played a major role in helping develop the Peel ALUS Pilot and providing input to the Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan and contributes to the Region's efforts to achieve its agricultural goals, objectives and policies.

a) 2021 Programs and Projects

i) Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan Review

PAAWG was provided with regular updates on the Peel 2051 Regional 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 PRWQP since 2004. The PRWQP provides technical and financial resources to farmers to encourage stewardship focused on protecting and enhancing water quality and the natural environment. PAAWG is the approval authority for grant applications submitted under the program.

In 2021, PAAWG approved approximately \$47,600 in grants supporting the implementation of 10 voluntary farm stewardship projects. The grants leveraged an additional \$95,000 from project proponents and other funders (e.g., Provincial Species at Risk Stewardship Program, Conservation Authority restoration services, etc.) to help complete these projects. The projects included tree planting, cover crop, erosion control, nutrient management, livestock fencing and public education on agricultural practices in Peel Region, to protect watercourses and other environmentally sensitive features. Appendix I provides more information about the program's accomplishments.

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iii) Grown in Peel

The Grown in Peel Local Food Guide has been published by the Region since 2006. It is a joint initiative with the Planning and Development Services Division and Peel's Healthy Eating Team within the Region's Health Services Department.

Grown in Peel 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. Grown in Peel 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 Grown in Peel program was paused in March 2020 due to COVID-19 redeployments of staff. The Guide is being relaunched in May 2022 with a new, online format for the 2022 farm and farm market year.

iv) Other Topics

The following additional topics and projects in 2021 were reviewed by PAAWG for discussion and feedback.

- Refresh of the Grown in Peel Local Food Guide program and website
- Approval of ALUS Peel program guidelines and funding application review process
- Brampton Stormwater Charge By-law
- Town of Caledon Official Plan Review – Agricultural Trends Study
- Farm Etiquette Awareness Communication Campaign
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority – Draft Update to TRCA Agricultural Land Policy for TRCA owned Lands
- Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance – Draft Event Barn Position Paper
- Town of Caledon Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments respecting cannabis cultivation
- Ontario Soil Online Road Trip – enabling farmers to learn about soil conservation practices on farms in Peel and across Ontario.

b) 2022 PAAWG Work Plan

The following action items have been identified in the 2022 PAAWG work plan. Appendix II provides more detailed information about the work plan.

Policy Research, Development and Monitoring

- Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan Review – updates on statutory consultation, adoption and Provincial approval of the new Region of Peel Official Plan;
- Local Municipal Official Plan Reviews;
- Review of the Toronto and Region Conservation's Natural Heritage System and Water Resource System Update and Mapping;
- Review of the Agricultural Census 2021 release; and,
- Review of the release of Provincial Agricultural Impact Assessment guidelines.

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Policy and Program Implementation

- Review and approval of PRWQP funding applications;
- Review and approval of the ALUS Peel projects;
- Participate in and provide advice on the Grown in Peel local food guide;
- Implementation of Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan related projects and programming; and,
- Participate in action items identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan.

Regional Projects and Initiatives

- Advise on opportunities to develop an agriculture and agri-food strategy;
- Support the Peel Food Action Council and implementation of the Peel Food Charter;
- Review and comment on proposed Regional capital infrastructure development projects and initiatives; and,
- Review and comment on partner (e.g., Conservation Authority, Local Municipal, etc.) programs and projects impacting Peel's agricultural community

Communication and Outreach

- Assist in developing Peel Region farm tours (pending COVID-19) and other communication and outreach initiatives

3. ALUS Peel Pilot

a) Background

ALUS Canada is a Canadian non-profit organization that works with farmers to restore natural habitat and provide erosion control and flood mitigation on marginal farmland by providing annual financial support to farmers through local, community-led programs.

ALUS Canada shares many of the goals and principles of the PRWQP. 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.

In May 2021, Regional Council endorsed a three-year ALUS Peel Pilot and authorized the Commissioner of Public Works to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ALUS Canada, CVC and the TRCA to implement the ALUS Peel Pilot. In 2022, the MOU was signed, creating the first partnership of its kind in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, reflecting the Region's leadership in supporting the environmental stewardship work of farmers.

b) The ALUS Peel Pilot

Through the MOU, ALUS Canada has committed a minimum level of base funding of \$164,500 over the three years of the pilot. The funding provided by ALUS Canada will, at a minimum, cover the costs of annual payments to farmers for natural habitat restoration projects. In 2021, ALUS Canada received partner funding in the amount of \$54,500 from the Greenbelt Foundation for the first year of the pilot.

PAAWG supports the ALUS Peel Pilot and will provide advice to staff on the implementation of the program as well as approve funding for project applications. In 2021, PAAWG

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assisted in the development of the ALUS Peel program guidelines and the program was launched to Peel's agricultural community in March 2022.

Staff will report back on the outcomes of ALUS Peel with recommendations on whether to extend the pilot beyond the initial three-year term.

4. 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 GHFFA 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.

In 2020, the GHFFA developed a new Action Plan to guide the GHFFA over the next five years, from 2021 to 2026. 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.

Each municipal partner has supported the GHFFA 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.

a) Accomplishments 2021

During 2021, the GHFFA undertook the following in support of the Action Plan:

- Updated "ConnectON" (formerly the agri-asset mapping) to include the Golden Horseshoe's connections to the agricultural system with the municipalities in Northern Ontario;
- Completion of the "Serving Up Local 2" initiative to increase the amount of local food procured in municipally owned long-term care facilities;
- Provided comment to the Province on:
 - Growing of the Greenbelt Plan area across the Golden Horseshoe; and,
 - Provincial use of Ministerial Zoning Orders.
- Continued sharing of best practices in economic development and land use planning among staff members of the partner municipalities (e.g., presentations on ALUS Peel, City of Toronto food hall incubator project, York and Durham Region's new farmer initiative, etc.);
- Released a draft position paper on "Event Barns as On-Farm Diversified Uses" and consulted with the Regional agricultural advisory groups; and,
- Hosted a training for municipalities staff on land use planning for cannabis production.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

The Region has been supporting the GHFFA through its annual operating budget of \$30,000 since 2014. This funding was approved by Regional Council to continue for a period of five years from 2022 to 2026, the term of the GHFFA'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 Region, across the Golden Horseshoe and with the Province. Both organizations make important contributions supporting farmers and the agricultural system in Peel Region. The ALUS Peel Pilot complements the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program, providing incentives for farmers to increase their environmental stewardship activities. The Grown in Peel Local Food Guide continues to connect Peel residents to Peel's vibrant agricultural business promoting local food access opportunities.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Peel Rural Water Quality Program 2021 Status Report

Appendix II - Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group 2022 Work Plan

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Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works