

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE



To / Destinataire	Mayor and Members of Council	File/N° de fichier:
From / Expéditeur	Michael Mizzi Acting General Manager Planning and Growth Management Department	
Subject / Objet	Summary of Alternative Funding Sources and Protection Mechanisms for Environmentally Sensitive Lands	Date: 06 July 2015

This memorandum has been prepared in response to a request from the Environment Committee during debate on the 2015 – 2018 Term of Council Priorities for “options regarding reliable sources of funding for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive (i.e. woodlot) lands.”

Appendix 1 to this memorandum includes a summary of alternative funding sources and protection mechanisms for urban natural features that was prepared for the 2013 Urban Natural Features Strategy Update report. Staff have reviewed the summary and confirmed that the conclusions are still valid.

The report recommended that Council consider outright acquisition of the three remaining features, “... in the 2015 – 2018 Term of Council Priority setting exercise.” The three features recommended in the report for acquisition are: UNA 193 – Shea Road Woods (7 hectares, Ward 6), UNA 95 – Nantes Woods (2.6 hectares, Ward 19), UNA 100 – Armstrong Road South Woods (8.2 hectares, Ward 22). These were considered important in their local communities, either providing critical greenspace or being in current use by community residents. Due to financial constraint, funding for these three features was not brought forward in the 2015-2018 City Strategic Plan.

Official Plan Direction

Section 5.2.1 (5) of the Official Plan (OP) says that, “the City has a particular interest in ensuring that lands in the following designations are secured in a way that is consistent with their greenspace values: Natural Environment Areas, Significant Wetlands, Urban Natural Features, and Major Open Space.” Where lands are not constrained from development by other factors, the policy says that the City will acquire Natural Environment Areas, Urban Natural Features, and Major Open Space, “at the request of the landowners.”

At present, the City has approximately \$50,000 in uncommitted funds in its environmental land acquisition budget. Approximately \$1.5 million remains in the Environmental Resource Area Acquisition Reserve Fund. No new funds have been committed to acquisition.

Urban/Suburban Environmental Lands

Staff have investigated the potential for acquisition and/or protection of unconstrained, privately-owned urban natural features using the following funding sources and mechanisms:

Special Services Levy	Corporate Sponsorship
Local Improvement Charge	Private Land Stewardship
Section 37 (community benefit for increased density or height)	Conservation Easements
Grant Programs	Tax Benefit Programs (e.g. Federal Ecogift Program)
Sale of City Lands	Parkland Dedication or cash-in-lieu
Land Exchanges	Long-term lease

The review concluded that none of these funding sources or mechanisms provides a practical or reliable alternative to funding through the general property tax, although some might be useful on a case-by-case basis. In general, none of these options can satisfy the financial expectations of property owners, given the high market value of otherwise developable, urban land.

Moving forward, Official Plan policies now require that any natural heritage system features in urban expansion study areas be conveyed to the City for \$1 prior to any new development. However, this policy cannot be applied retroactively to lands already within the urban boundary.

Rural Environmental Lands

A broader range of acquisition and protection options exists for rural environmental lands, given lower property values. Private land stewardship, financial support for private land stewardship, conservation easements and tax benefit programs may all provide viable alternatives to “fee simple” acquisition by the City.

Other groups, organizations and agencies often have an overlapping interest in the acquisition or protection of rural environmental lands. These include the three local Conservation Authorities, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and other land trusts, the National Capital Commission, non-profit stewardship organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Community Foundation of Ottawa. Opportunities exist to leverage conservation funds and resources from these organizations, including funds currently available under the National Wetland Conservation Fund and the National Conservation Plan.

A recent example of a successful partnership is the Carp River Wetland and Habitat Restoration Project, in which the City funded 50% of the cost of construction of new wetland and species at risk habitat along the Carp River, with Ducks Unlimited Canada and the National Wetland Conservation Fund funding the remainder. The project supported the goals of the Water Environment Strategy, the Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan, the Carp River Subwatershed Plan and the City’s natural heritage system policies.

Original signed by:

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Attach. 1