

# Item 8.1

## Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Executive Committee  
Meeting #1/19, Friday, February 08, 2019

**FROM:** Michael Tolensky, Chief Financial and Operating Officer

**RE:** **GREENLANDS ACQUISITION PROJECT FOR 2016-2020**  
Flood Plain and Conservation Component, Petticoat Creek Watershed  
1815 Altona Road, Pickering. Rosemary Speirs Property Donation – Ecological  
Gift Program (CFN 55448).

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### KEY ISSUE

Donation of a parcel of land situated to the east of Altona Road and north of Sheppard Avenue, 1815 Altona Road, in the City of Pickering, Regional Municipality of Durham, under the “Greenlands Acquisition Project for 2016-2020,” Flood Plain and Conservation Component, Petticoat Creek Watershed.

### RECOMMENDATION

**THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT TRCA accept title to the lands to be donated by Rosemary Speirs, containing 1.27 hectares (3.02 acres), more or less, improved with a residence, detached garage and guest house, situated to the east of Altona Road and north of Sheppard Avenue, said land being Part of Lot 32, Concession 1, municipally known as 1815 Altona Road, in the City of Pickering, Regional Municipality of Durham;**

**THAT the donation is to be on the following basis:**

- a) The purchase price be \$2.00;**
- b) An income tax receipt to be made available to Rosemary Speirs for the final appraisal value, in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Canada Revenue Agency and terms of reference as required by the Ecological Gifts Program;**
- c) TRCA be responsible for appraisal, environmental audit and vendor’s reasonable legal fees associated with completion of the transaction;**

**THAT TRCA extend its appreciation and thanks to Rosemary Speirs for her generous donation;**

**THAT TRCA receive conveyance of the land free from encumbrance, subject to existing service easements;**

**THAT the firm Gardiner Roberts LLP, be instructed to complete the transaction at the earliest possible date. All reasonable expenses incurred incidental to the closing for land transfer tax, legal costs, and disbursements are to be paid by TRCA;**

**AND FURTHER THAT authorized TRCA officials be directed to take the necessary action to finalize the transaction, including obtaining any necessary approvals and the signing and execution of documents.**

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### **BACKGROUND**

The subject property is located on the east side of Altona Road and north of Sheppard Avenue, 1815 Altona Road, in the City of Pickering, Regional Municipality of Durham. TRCA staff has been approached by Rosemary Speirs regarding the donation of 1.27 hectares (3.02 acres), more or less, of land which is located adjacent to Altona Forrest. Ms. Speirs has requested that the donation be made under Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program.

One of the requirements of Environment Canada for the eligibility of the property under the Ecological Gift Program is to remove the existing buildings and restore the entire site to natural habitat. The ecological restoration work will increase the habitat value within the larger Altona Forest. Reforesting this area will provide additional buffering between Altona Road and the forest interior, increasing the amount of interior forest. The acquisition of these lands by TRCA will ensure the long term restoration and protection of this property and will enhance the adjacent lands already within public ownership.

Resolution #A161/15 at Authority Meeting #8/15, held on September 25, 2015, approved the Greenlands Acquisition Project for 2016-2020.

TRCA staff has conducted negotiations with Rosemary Speirs, her son John Deverell (Power of Attorney) and her legal counsel Wes Brown.

Attached is a sketch illustrating the location of the subject lands.

### **RATIONALE**

The acquisition of 1815 Altona Road, Pickering through the Federal Ecological Gift Program, will not only expand the existing Altona Forest but allow for important restoration opportunities in order to enhance ecological functions of the property.

The site, known as Cobble Hill, is located in the southwest corner of Altona Forest in Pickering within the Petticoat Creek watershed. Altona Forest is part of TRCA's Terrestrial Natural Heritage System as well as the City of Pickering's Natural Heritage System. The adjacent section of Altona Forest was previously donated to TRCA by Dr. J. Murray Speirs, father of Rosemary Speirs and a prominent ornithologist who used the site for scientific study. The majority of the forest is currently in public ownership and protected from development.

Altona Forest is significant from a landscape perspective as it makes up 8% of the natural area in the entire Petticoat Creek watershed. The forest's northern end is connected to the Rouge-Duffins Wildlife Corridor which provides an important wildlife movement corridor between the Rouge River watershed to the west and the Duffins Creek watershed to the east. This property helps to link Altona Forest with the nearby Rouge National Urban Park, a large area of protected greenspace. Furthermore, Altona Forest's relatively southern location makes this area an important location for migrating songbirds travelling towards and from staging areas on the shores of Lake Ontario.

While the site currently contains a few buildings (covering approximately 10% of the land), the property is largely forested with three different forest communities: fresh moist sugar maple hardwood deciduous forest, fresh moist white cedar hardwood deciduous forest, and native deciduous successional woodland. The Altona Forest is the largest contiguous forest within the Petticoat Creek watershed. The size and shape of the forest are important for the habitat quality as they create two large areas of interior forest which are critical for providing habitat to area

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sensitive bird species. The property is adjacent to a large wetland but also contains a small duckweed wetland within the property itself.

Within Altona Forest there are 46 flora species of conservation concern, three of which are also regionally rare: pointed broom sedge (*Carex scoparia*), wood's sedge (*Carex woodii*), and prickly-ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*). The endangered butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) was found within the forest. Additionally, there are 21 bird species of conservation concern, as well as eight herpetofauna and six mammals of conservation concern. Fifteen of the bird species found in the forest are considered area sensitive as well as three of the frog species. Eastern wood peewee (*Contopus virens*) is a species of special concern that was found to be using the forest habitat. A complete list of flora and fauna species currently found at the site and within Altona Forest is documented in the Altona Forest Terrestrial and Biological Inventory and Assessment.

### **DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE**

TRCA staff has made a submission to Environment Canada and is waiting for a certificate confirming the ecologically sensitivity of the site, as required under the Ecological Gifts Program. The firm of Wojas Appraisal Group Inc. was engaged to undertake an independent valuation of the property. Their opinion of fee simple value of the property is \$1,000,000. Once the *Certificate of Ecological Sensitive Land* is received, the appraisal will be submitted to Environment Canada for the appraisal review and determination process. After the review is completed Environment Canada will issue a *Notice of Determination of Fair Market Value of an Ecological Gift*.

### **TAXES AND MAINTENANCE**

Based on TRCA's preliminary review of the environmental criteria for lands that are eligible to receive a property tax exemption under the provincial Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program, it would appear that portions of the subject property may be eligible for a tax exemption and the remainder may be eligible once the restoration work has been completed. It is estimated that the subject parcel of land yearly taxes will be \$1,500. While it is expected that the subject parcel of land will not significantly impact TRCA's maintenance costs at this location, an assessment of the aggregate acquisitions in the area will be undertaken and the results will be integrated into TRCA's land management program and associated budgets.

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

TRCA staff has estimated the cost of demolition, restoration, Land Transfer Tax, HST, legal, appraisal, environment audit and disconnection of services to be approximately \$200,000. Staff is currently attempting to source these funds through the Regional Municipality of Durham, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, foundations such as the Gosling Foundation and the EJLB Foundation, and other similar funding sources. Should alternate funding sources not be available, land sale revenue is available for the costs related to this donation.

**Report prepared by: Brandon Hester, extension 5767**

**Emails: [bhester@trca.on.ca](mailto:bhester@trca.on.ca)**

**For Information contact: Brandon Hester, extension 5767, Mike Fenning, extension 5223**

**Emails: [bhester@trca.on.ca](mailto:bhester@trca.on.ca), [mfenning@trca.on.ca](mailto:mfenning@trca.on.ca)**

**Date: December 18, 2018**

**Attachments: 1**

**Attachment 1: Location of the subject lands**