

## Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Board of Directors  
Meeting #8/19, Friday, September 27, 2019

**FROM:** Laurie Nelson, Director, Policy Planning

**RE:** **POSITIVELY GREEN**  
100+ Priority Projects to Enhance Our Greenbelt

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### KEY ISSUE

To provide a summary of a Greenbelt restoration initiative that is a collaboration between thirteen conservation authorities, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, and other partners.

### RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the presentation by Edward McDonnell, CEO, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation be received;**

**THAT the Positively Green project be endorsed and that staff be approved to enter into agreements with the Friends of the Greenbelt or funding bodies subject to funding approvals;**

**AND FURTHER THAT TRCA staff continue to work with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to advance the Positively Green: 100+ Priority Projects to Enhance our Greenbelt initiative.**

### BACKGROUND

In 2015, the nine conservation authorities of the Conservation Authorities Moraine Coalition (CAMC) completed a “Report Card on the Environmental Health of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Adjacent Greenbelt Lands”. The Report Card was funded, in part, by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. The purpose of the Report Card was to document current environmental conditions on the Oak Ridges Moraine and adjacent Greenbelt lands in order to inform the 10-year review of the Provincial Plans for those lands, as well as the review of the Growth Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The Report Card revealed three main conclusions:

1. Implementation of the Moraine and Greenbelt Plans through *Planning Act* applications was sufficient to maintain existing conditions, but not enough to achieve the Plans’ goals and objectives to restore and enhance these lands.
2. Without the use of additional tools to restore and enhance natural systems across the Moraine and Greenbelt landscape, environmental conditions may be expected to decline over time due to the cumulative impacts from continued growth, related infrastructure and climate change.
3. The sustained and targeted use of additional watershed stewardship and municipal tools are needed to enhance and restore environmental conditions across the Greenbelt.

Subsequent to the completion of the Report Card, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation (FGF) approached the CAMC to prepare an “Action Plan for Ecological Enhancement across the Greenbelt”, in order to address the environmental deficits identified in the Report Card. Four additional conservation authorities (CA) with watersheds encompassing the Niagara Escarpment joined the project to ensure coverage of the entire Greenbelt landscape. The goal of the project is to create an Action Plan for undertaking high priority, high impact

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programs/projects that will, over time, result in the restoration and enhancement of the environmental health, improved biodiversity, resilience and connectivity of Greenbelt watersheds. After a year of work, a list of 111 projects was submitted to the FGF in 2017.

### RATIONALE

With the addition of the four CA partners having Niagara Escarpment watersheds (Conservation Halton, the Hamilton, Niagara Peninsula and Grey Sauble conservation authorities), and to better align with the geography of the four Provincial Plans, the CAMC rebranded itself as the Greenbelt Golden Horseshoe Conservation Authority Collaborative (GGH CAC) to undertake this project. Currently the CAO of Credit Valley Conservation chairs the Collaborative, while the coordinator role remains at TRCA, with the Senior Manager, Provincial & Regional Policy, in the Policy Planning Division.

Since the submission of the list of projects to the FGF by the GGH CAC, the FGF has been undertaking several additional components of the project. This includes the development of a funding strategy, a communications/branding plan, and related initiatives to make the business case for ecological enhancement projects, as well as research into a carbon offset program as part of the funding strategy. As part of these efforts the FGF made a pre-budget submission for funding from the 2019 federal budget while the CAs helped to facilitate letters of support from their local MPs.

The project has now been rebranded as “*Positively Green: 100+ Priority Projects to Enhance our Greenbelt*”. The restoration priorities are organized around three environmental outcomes:

- Increasing biodiversity by improving habitat and restoring connectivity to benefit species at risk, fish and ranges of large mammals;
- Protecting and improving water quality and groundwater, and the clean and abundant base flows provided to rivers and lakes; and,
- Advancing the use of green infrastructure by municipalities as a climate mitigation and adaptation tool, particularly to manage stormwater and flooding, as well as to sequester carbon.

*Positively Green* has more than 100 shovel-ready priority projects on the ground in communities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. These projects are community-facing and provide real, tangible examples of how climate action benefits people and neighbourhoods directly. The projects are grouped into six main categories and include:

1. **Forestation and Cooling Corridors** – such as tree planting and habitat restoration to increase biodiversity, create interior forest, restore connectivity, protect water quality and strengthen climate resiliency.
2. **Wetlands and Stormwater/Flood Control** – such as restoring historic wetlands to reduce flood risk to downstream communities, securement of provincially significant wetlands into public ownership and replacement of on-line stormwater ponds with constructed wetlands.
3. **Habitat Restoration and Biodiversity** – such as restoration of rare habitats supporting species at risk, eradication of invasive species and fish barrier mitigation and riparian restoration to improve fish habitat.
4. **Major Lake and River System Improvements** – including support to implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) programs and agricultural best management practices.
5. **Enhancing Greenspace and Public Access** – such as improvements to existing natural environment destinations and interpretive facilities and the creation of new, future environmental and outdoor recreational spaces.

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6. **Climate Leadership and Innovation** – including promoting road ecology, mitigating climate emissions through carbon sequestration, creating cooling corridors in the urban river valleys and supporting municipal natural asset management plans.

Projects contributed by TRCA include:

- headwater tributary restoration in the Don, Rouge and Humber River watersheds;
- biodiversity enhancement and stewardship across TRCA Greenbelt watersheds based on the TRCA Integrated Restoration Prioritization and Implementation program;
- fish barrier mitigation and habitat restoration for Atlantic salmon; and,
- the Brocklands Restoration project in the Duffins Creek watershed to naturalize a 1000-acre site and create a new recreation destination.

The Brocklands Restoration project was also selected as one of three projects for evaluation through a “business case” cost-benefit analysis study. The analysis of this project found that every dollar spent on capital and project costs resulted in \$3.56 to \$4.45 worth of benefits.

### **Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

**Strategy 2 – Manage our regional water resources for current and future generations**

**Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value**

**Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models**

**Strategy 12 – Facilitate a region-wide approach to sustainability**

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

The cost to implement the entire 111 projects is estimated at \$100 million over ten years. The FGF made a pre-budget submission to the federal government in Spring 2019 for \$27M in funding over five years. This contribution, if successful, would act as the seed money to leverage the additional funding over the ten-year period from provincial and municipal governments, businesses, foundations and non-government organizations.

Each of the thirteen individual CA partners are responsible for funding their own projects through various partnership and funding arrangements. Within TRCA watersheds, some of the ten projects identified are already partially funded with implementation currently underway. One example is the Brocklands Restoration project noted above, that is funded in large part through the tipping fees collected for the clean fill deposited on the site for use in the restoration works.

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

The FGF continues their work to assess the viability of creating a carbon offset program to provide funding for the projects. They are also promoting the project and seeking funding through presentations to municipal councils, CA boards of directors, meetings with Federal MPs and Provincial MPPs and other potential funding and implementation partners. Where funding has been arranged, some projects are currently being implemented on the ground to improve environmental conditions, mitigate flooding impacts and increase resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

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