

Section III – Items for the Information of the Board

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, March 26, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Michael Tolensky, Chief Financial and Operating Officer
Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services

RE: **WATERSHED PLANNING & REPORTING PROGRAM**
Strategic Business Planning Initiative

KEY ISSUE

To provide information to the Board of Directors regarding a planned initiative to modernize Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Watershed Planning and Reporting program.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS TRCA staff have assessed the existing Watershed Planning & Reporting program, identifying opportunities for improving the program to better serve the needs of our municipal partners;

WHEREAS TRCA staff are recommending an approach to watershed planning that accelerates the existing process through budget enhancement to support the simultaneous development of three watershed plans at various stages at any given time, rather than just one watershed plan;

AND WHEREAS Benefits of this approach will ensure that municipalities have timely and up-to-date science to guide land use and infrastructure decisions and will enable TRCA municipal partners to conform to provincial policies requiring that they undertake watershed planning;

THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Strategic Business Planning Policy Statement of Interest report outlining the details for improving the Watershed Planning & Reporting program be received.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with TRCA's Strategic Business Planning (SBP) Policy, all potential new projects/programs or proposed modifications to existing initiatives must proceed through the SBP Policy workflow, including reporting to the Board of Directors for informational purposes.

Watershed plans are strategic documents that are intended to direct the work of conservation authorities (CAs), municipalities, and their government and community partners to achieve the goal of watershed health. Recent changes to provincial policies now require municipalities, in partnership with CAs, to ensure watershed planning is undertaken to inform land use and infrastructure planning decisions. Given the breadth of watershed planning and management experience, TRCA is well-positioned to deliver watershed plans to assist its municipal partners achieve policy conformity. These watershed plans require updates to include new science and policy direction, as well as collaboration and alignment of priorities across the organization to both develop and implement the plans.

RATIONALE

The Watershed Planning & Reporting (WPR) business unit currently has an annual budget of approximately \$625,000, which allows for one watershed plan to be underway in any given year, taking a total of 3 years to complete each plan. The enhanced WPR approach would enable the ability to have three watershed plans under development at various stages each year. This would enable all TRCA watershed plans to be updated on roughly a 10-year cycle ensuring up-to-date science is available to TRCA and its partners and stakeholders. To achieve this vision of a 10-year cycle, an additional \$600K per year is required, for a total annual WPR budget of \$1.2M.

The scope of watershed plans would generally include analysis of the flooding, erosion, water quality, natural heritage (incl. urban forest), and water resource system characteristics of a watershed and recommend the management actions needed to ensure watershed health is protected and restored in the face of drivers like climate and land use changes. The total required budget of \$1.2M includes the scoping and development of the watershed plans, but excludes resources required for watershed plan implementation and additional watershed monitoring as recommended by the plan.

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

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

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

Strategy 8 – Gather and share the best sustainability knowledge

Strategy 9 – Measure performance

FINANCIAL DETAILS

To facilitate the enhanced WPR program, a total budget of \$1.2M is required. The existing budget of \$623,000 would remain as part of this initiative, resulting in a funding gap of approximately \$600,000.

To work towards securing the additional funding to support this program, a business plan inclusive of a financial strategy must be completed, resulting in the unfunded portion of the initiative being added to TRCA's unfunded priorities list. Given the reforms to the Conservation Authorities Act and the impending changes to the enabling Regulations, there may be a direct impact on the funding model for programs such as these, and it is recommended that this project consider these potential changes in the development of the funding strategy.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

In order to complete the watershed planning cycle, funding must be available to support watershed plan implementation, and direction generated from watershed plans needs to be incorporated across all business units and with external stakeholders.

With watershed plans requiring input and collaboration from across the organization, internal business units should work towards accommodating watershed plan updates in their work plans by working collaboratively with WPR to identify key tasks and timelines for required staff.

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Date: March 16, 2021