

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

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

FROM: Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services

RE: **JOINING THE ‘UNFLOOD ONTARIO’ NETWORK OF PARTNERS**
Co-promoting the benefits of natural infrastructure

KEY ISSUE

This report outlines the rationale and recommendation for the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to join Unflood Ontario’s network of partners, whose shared objectives include flood reduction and the promotion of natural infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS TRCA’s strategic objectives include the management of water resources, the championing of sustainable development technologies and natural infrastructure in building complete communities, and engagement with community members to foster sustainable citizenship;

AND WHEREAS Unflood Ontario, a project of the Durham Community Foundation, the Toronto Foundation, and the Niagara Community Foundation, managed by the Small Change Fund, seeks to build demand for urban-based natural infrastructure by engaging the ‘interested public and unusual allies’ using community engagement and communications tools;

THAT TRCA join the Unflood Ontario network of partners, allowing TRCA to be acknowledged as such on the Unflood Ontario website;

THAT TRCA utilize its communications channels, where feasible and appropriate, to share Unflood Ontario’s communications content, including videos, reports, and social media messaging;

AND THAT TRCA, through its relevant programs (including the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program, Partners in Project Green, and the Sustainable Technologies Evaluation Program), explore collaboration opportunities with Unflood Ontario to promote natural infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

TRCA’s mission is to protect, conserve and restore natural resources and develop resilient communities through education, the application of science, community engagement, service excellence and collaboration with our partners. As a watershed-based organization with a mandate that includes flood risk reduction and the conservation of natural resources working within an urban context, TRCA has several objectives and specific programs that champion the implementation of green infrastructure and natural infrastructure. These programs include the Sustainable Technologies Evaluation program, the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program, and Partners in Project Green.

Although flooding is a natural process, TRCA undertakes a variety of programs to reduce the

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risk of flooding to people and property, including education and outreach to residents living in flood vulnerable neighbourhoods and where feasible, advancing site-specific flood risk remediation. Simultaneously, TRCA's stormwater management criteria and the Living City Policies recognize the cumulative impacts of urbanization to water quantity and quality, and conversely the cumulative benefits of low-impact development/green infrastructure. Although staff recognize that it is not possible to 'unflood' our region, staff recognize that the underlying objective is that of promoting green infrastructure and the shared goal of reducing flood risks.

Unflood Ontario is a project of the Durham Community Foundation, the Niagara Community Foundation and the Toronto Foundation, with project management provided by the Small Change Fund. It is part of the Great Lakes One Water Initiative, a basin-wide international network of 7 teams led by community and working to reduce lake pollution.

Unflood Ontario's stated objectives are to:

- 1) Build public demand for urban-based Natural Infrastructure (NI) by using the flooding frame and highlighting its multiple benefits, especially as a COVID-19 recovery action, by engaging the 'interested public and unusual allies' using community engagement and communications tools.
- 2) Facilitate getting Natural Infrastructure installed in Greater Golden Horseshoe communities.

RATIONALE

Representatives from Unflood Ontario recently approached TRCA to seek approval to become part of its network of partners. Conservation Ontario has also consented to being part of the network. Members of this network would commit to the following:

- 1) Having the organization name added to the Unflood Ontario network list on the Unflood Ontario website. It would appear under the following wording:
 - *Our Network: The following groups and individuals are working together to "unflood" Ontario by educating and engaging the public about the impact of floods and the multiple benefits of Natural Infrastructure.*
- 2) Using their own organization's communications channels to promote and share Unflood Ontario communications content (e.g. videos, reports, social media messaging) and call to action, coinciding with the program launch in April 2021.
- 3) Working with Unflood Ontario to find local opportunities to promote Natural Infrastructure and flood reduction.

Unflood Ontario would offer content, including videos and reports, that are written for the general public, as well as access to community level networks to help mobilize the interested public to support policy matters. This content could be utilized by TRCA programs with similar strategic objectives.

TRCA's Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) will seek opportunities to cross-promote the Unflood Ontario movement as part of its ongoing initiatives in flood-prone communities. SNAP is a neighbourhood-based program for sustainable urban renewal and climate action which is underway in a number of neighbourhoods in the Toronto Region. Unflood Ontario videos and other helpful tools may be shared with residents in conjunction with local SNAP initiatives, including home retrofit programs, implementation of green infrastructure revitalization projects and neighbourhood resiliency programming.

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The Sustainable Technologies Evaluation Program will also cross-promote and share Unflood Ontario communications to user groups. STEP is a collaborative between TRCA, CVC and LSRCA aimed at supporting broader adoption of sustainable stormwater practices in Ontario through research, the development of best practice guidelines and decision support tools, professional training and public outreach. Unflood Ontario videos and communications on Natural and Green Stormwater Infrastructure will be shared with other STEP materials through newsletters, social media and selected STEP events.

TRCA will also provide links to Unflood Ontario, so that their website can link back to TRCA expert content, ranging from low-impact development guidelines and best practices, to flood risk management personal preparedness resources, to various educational workshops and “do-it-yourself” guidelines for installing backyard rainwater management features.

The Unflood Ontario campaign consists of several videos and research papers, and is set to launch on April 19, 2021, with Earth Day occurring on April 22, 2021.

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 4 – Create complete communities that integrate nature and the built environment

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 8 – Gather and share the best sustainability knowledge

FINANCIAL DETAILS

There are no financial commitments to being a part of Unflood Ontario’s network of partners.

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