

,Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Executive Committee
Friday, April 01, 2022 Meeting

FROM: Michael Tolensky, Chief Financial and Operating Officer

RE: **TRCA AGRICULTURAL LAND USE POLICY**
Approval of amendments to TRCA's current *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy*

KEY ISSUE

As part of the five-year policy review process outlined in Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA's) *Policy Management Policy*, to seek endorsement of the revised *Agricultural Land Use Policy*.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS TRCA has been administering agricultural leases on its land since the 1950s, and continues to manage agricultural lands across its jurisdiction;

WHEREAS TRCA adopted a *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy* on September 19, 2008, for its agricultural lands;

WHEREAS TRCA's *Policy Management Policy*, specifies that TRCA review and update its policies at least once every five years;

AND WHEREAS TRCA staff have reviewed and amended the current *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy* considering new information, changing context, stakeholder input, and other factors;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the revised *Agricultural Land Use Policy* be endorsed and adopted.

BACKGROUND

At Board of Directors Meeting, held on September 19, 2008, Resolution #A200/08 was approved as follows:

"WHEREAS sustainable near-urban agriculture:

- promotes social equity and food security in communities by providing opportunities for increased accessibility to fresh, healthy and local food;*
- provides opportunities for community economic development by helping to reduce the number of imports and by creating jobs and meaningful work for the local people;*
- reduces our ecological footprint by providing locally grown, raised and sold food, reducing food miles and greenhouse gas emissions related to food transportation and helps to reduce the impacts of climate change;*
- can provide a space for celebrating the cultural diversity of communities by growing a diverse range of crops;*
- provides a positive influence on adjacent natural heritage; and*

Item 7.2

- *complements Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) vision for The Living City by participating in growing local foods that contribute to sustainable communities.*

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the TRCA Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy for lands owned and directly managed by TRCA, dated September 2008, as appended in Attachment 1, be approved;...."

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA's) history in agriculture commenced in the 1950s when TRCA began acquiring land for flood and erosion control, which resulted in an inventory of productive agricultural lands, some of which were leased for agricultural use.

Prior to 2008, agriculture was regarded as an interim use of TRCA lands, with the long-term goal being that the lands be reforested or used for other purposes.

In 2008, TRCA adopted a *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy* (the Policy) for its agricultural lands. This Policy covered both urban and conventional farms, with emphasis on urban agriculture, and facilitated the development of TRCA's Urban Agricultural Program. This Policy recognized that agricultural lands are a natural resource of major importance, and that farmers and agricultural organizations are valuable contributors to the environment, community, and economy. The Policy acknowledged TRCA's commitment to agriculture as a legitimate and long-term use for some of its lands, and the importance of conserving TRCA's agricultural land base by implementing long-term lease frameworks and encouraging investment and stewardship of its lands.

TRCA's The Living City Policies reference the Policy, stating that TRCA will engage in partnerships and programs in agriculture on TRCA-owned lands, in compliance with TRCA's *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy* for lands owned and managed by TRCA.

TRCA has approximately 247.5 hectares of agricultural lands currently under lease. Of the 247.5 hectares combined, thirteen conventional farms cover 227 hectares, four urban farms cover 20 hectares, and one community and allotment garden that is less than 1 hectare in size. Implementing this Policy is therefore integral to meeting The Living City Policies' goal of promoting the benefits of agriculture to the planning and development of sustainable communities.

Given the necessity for ongoing management of TRCA agricultural land, and as part of TRCA's commitment to review & update policies every five years as per TRCA's *Policy Management Policy*, TRCA staff completed an extensive review of the existing *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy*. Considering Peel Region's significant financial support of TRCA's Urban Agriculture Program and other programs that support agricultural producers, a draft version of the policy was reviewed by Region of Peel staff and the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group, both of which provided comments and suggestions for the draft policy. In addition, as part of their review staff conducted visits to farms and the one allotment gardens. Furthermore, the farms were reviewed in the context of other TRCA priorities and initiatives, to determine whether continued use for agriculture made sense considering the planning context, and other TRCA and government partner objectives.

The amended *Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy* was renamed the *Agricultural Land Use Policy* (the 'amended Policy') to reflect its updated focus from mainly urban agriculture to all types of agriculture on TRCA land (Attachment 2). This amended Policy is to be read in

Item 7.2

conjunction with TRCA's *Agricultural and Future Directions* report adopted on February 26, 2021 (RES.#A16/21).

The amended Policy focuses on the optimal use of all TRCA agricultural land, inclusive of lands under lease, as well as vacant land parcels. To ensure TRCA agricultural land is used and managed in a sustainable, consistent, transparent, and effective manner, the amended Policy includes further clarity on staff responsibility, and newly developed guidelines, procedures, and frameworks, to aid in its implementation.

Enhancements to the amended Policy acknowledge that a variety of agricultural practices occur on TRCA land, and references three lease models (Community and Allotment Garden, Conventional, and Urban), providing further clarity on lease terms and conditions. The *Establishment of a Rental Rate Procedure* in the amended Policy, references the necessity to appraise agricultural land, and is cognizant of additional factors that could influence the level of the rental range applied to TRCA agricultural lease agreements, such as the Region in which the land is located, site access, soil type and quality, agricultural models, available infrastructure, and buildings to support farming operations. Also, the amended Policy sees an enhanced focus on the Environmental Farm Plan process, implementing Best Management Practices, and recognizes the importance of engaging TRCA's agricultural tenants in this process.

Further, when TRCA agricultural land becomes vacant or is newly acquired, the amended Policy has established guidelines for interim management plans of vacant land, as well as a procedure and corresponding framework, to determine the future use of the land (*Procedure to Determine Continued Agricultural Use of the Land*).

The amended Policy recognizes that the management and sustainable use of TRCA land requires appropriate consultation and accountability, in alignment with TRCA's strategic direction, core values, and within the regulatory and legislative environment that TRCA operates. Through these policy amendments, TRCA will continue to align with multiple federal, provincial, and municipal objectives, which include agriculture, climate action, human health, building community capacity and resilience, and watershed plans. The amended Policy endorses TRCA's commitment for agriculture to be a legitimate and long-term use for some of its lands, and the importance of conserving TRCA's agricultural land base to help improve the health of our communities and watersheds, and to contribute to food security and a sustainable region.

RATIONALE

The amendments to the existing Policy further TRCA's objectives for regulatory requirements for policy review as well as requirements outlined in TRCA's *Policy Management* Policy.

The suggested amendments will continue to align with TRCA's The Living City Policies, which promote the benefits of agriculture to the planning and development of sustainable communities.

These amendments will further support Building The Living City, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) 2013 Strategic Plan, which identifies: Green the Toronto region's economy, Rethink greenspace to maximize its value, Foster sustainable citizenship, and Build partnerships and new business models as key actions to achieve regional sustainability within TRCA's watersheds.

Item 7.2

The amended Policy will ensure that the management of TRCA's agricultural land continues to deliver on multiple objectives, including those identified as priorities by federal, provincial, and municipal governments, such as agriculture, climate action, grey and green infrastructure renewal, human health, building community capacity and resilience, and the strategic objectives of the watershed plans.

Finally, considering the current COVID19 pandemic, locally grown food has been recognized as an important essential service for continuing Ontario's food supply, and an important means to empower communities to grow.

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 1 – Green the Toronto region's economy

Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

FINANCIAL DETAILS

TRCA's urban farm program is funded through various municipal capital and operating accounts, that are applicable to the region in which the farm resides. TRCA's conventional agriculture agreements are funded by the rental revenue generated through the management of the agricultural leasing program.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Implement adoption of TRCA's *Agricultural Land Use Policy* through the following actions:

- Engage TRCA agricultural tenants in the renewal process of Environmental Farm Plans, and where applicable, implement Best Management Practices.
- Procure an independent appraisal company to complete fair market assessment of TRCA agricultural land, and apply appropriately to agricultural lease agreements, and as specified in *Establishment of Rental Rate Procedure*.
- Review current lease agreements to apply appropriate amendments (i.e., Best Management Practices or rent adjustments), and notify TRCA's agricultural tenants accordingly.
- Review vacant agricultural land and determine best future use of the land, and as specified in the *Procedure to Determine Agricultural Use of Land*.

Report prepared by: Lisa Valente, extension 5297

Emails: lisa.valente@trca.ca

For Information contact: Alexander Schuler, extension 6452

Emails: alexander.schuler@trca.ca

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Attachments: 2

Attachment 1: TRCA Agricultural Agreements

Attachment 2: Agricultural Land Use Policy