

Report To: Board of Directors

Subject: Draft Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032

Report No: FA-24-22

Date: June 17, 2022

Recommendations:

1. **THAT** Report No. FA-24-222 RE: Draft Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032, as appended, **BE ENDORSED** in principle for the purpose of engaging with external partners to obtain input prior to finalizing the Strategy.
2. **THAT** staff **CONSULT** with municipal partners, land trusts, Indigenous organizations, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation, and Public Advisory Committee to seek input and to explore partnerships toward future land securement.
3. **THAT** staff **DEVELOP** policy to guide decision-making regarding land acquisition and disposition, as per the *Conservation Authorities Act*, O. Reg 686/21 (Sec. 9 (2)(vi)).
4. **AND FURTHER THAT** staff **REPORT** back to the Board of Directors for final approval of the Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032 and implementation priorities during Q4 of 2022.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to present the final Draft Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032 and obtain the Board of Directors' endorsement, in principle, for consultation with key stakeholders as well as the development of a land acquisition and disposition policy, as per the updated *Conservation Authorities Act*.

Background:

A land acquisition strategy was first prepared by the NPCA in 2007 and updated in 2015 (referred to as a Land Management Plan) aimed at securing ecologically-sensitive areas within the NPCA watershed. A recommendation from the Auditor General of Ontario's 2018 Special Audit of the NPCA specifically noted that a review and update of the 2015 Land Management Plan be conducted to improve its goals, criteria, funding options, implementation plan, and success measures. An updated draft Land Management Plan was presented to the Board of Directors in December 2019 (Report No. FA-163-19) and staff were further directed to expand on the program.

In May 2020, NPCA staff engaged the Board of Directors for input on developing a robust long-term land securement program aligned with the strategic plan and background research was completed. Further to the completion of NPCA 10-Year Strategic Plan in 2021, staff initiated the process of

developing the draft Land Securement Strategy to guide the securement of lands within the Niagara Peninsula watershed over the next decade for environmental, natural hazard protection, and societal (recreation, culture, health) benefits. The consulting firm, Orland Conservation, was retained to develop the Strategy with input from a staff team.

Discussion:

The draft Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032 (Appendix 1) provides the framework for the NPCA to secure public greenspace effectively using established best practices, sound decision-making, sustainable and innovative financial models, and collaboration.

The NPCA currently owns or manages 41 conservation areas which account for approximately 2,946 hectares (or 1.2%) of lands within its watershed jurisdiction. Despite having secured the most lands compared to other conservation organizations in the watershed, the NPCA falls significantly behind the land securement achievements of its two neighbouring conservation authorities. Further, according to the NPCA's 'Nature for Niagara's Future' study (2011), the Niagara Peninsula watershed only achieves 56% towards what science recommends is required to sustain a healthy and resilient landscape. A long-term land securement strategy, in combination with other watershed-based programs, is necessary to help the NPCA achieve its strategic goals related to increasing biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and natural cover while creating equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people and building relationships with partners, stakeholders, and Indigenous peoples.

The watershed contains a multitude of important natural resources needing protection to sustain life. It is not feasible to secure all the important natural resources in the watershed with limited resources; therefore, land securement criteria are imperative to prioritize areas to be considered and actively pursued. The strategy guides the application of primary criteria focused on watershed features and functions while considering secondary criteria such as parcel size, securement method, and cost. Given that the amount of land meeting these criteria would be considered unwieldy to secure in any timeframe, the Land Securement Strategy identifies six landowner outreach areas (LOAs) to provide a manageable number of target areas as the focus of a proposed landowner outreach program within the Strategy's 10-year horizon.

By collaborating with other land securement organizations and partners, applying for funding where possible, and launching a targeted landowner outreach program within the six LOAs, the NPCA can expect to secure a minimum of 180 hectares (i.e., average 20 ha annually, 1 property per year secured) by 2032. As landowner outreach and land securement projects occur, momentum of the land securement program will likely increase and give rise to more landowner and funder/partner interest. If executed consistently, the more aggressive land securement target of 360 hectares secured by 2032 (i.e., average of 40 ha annually, two properties per year) may become attainable.

The Land Securement Strategy offers 8 recommendations to ensure the NPCA achieves its objectives:

1. Develop and adopt policies that guide decision-making regarding land acquisition and disposition, as per *Conservation Authorities Act, O. Reg 686/21* (Sec. 9 (2)(vi)).
2. Develop and implement a land securement program including:
 - a. staff and financial resources
 - b. annual work plans and targets and performance measures
 - c. outreach and engagement plan and associated collaterals

- d. internal staff team to evaluate potential land securement projects from technical, operational, and financial perspectives
 - e. continued augmentation of land acquisition reserve in accordance with NPCA board-approved reserve policy
3. Ensure NPCA Indigenous engagement guidelines support opportunities to work together on land securement.
4. Engage with land securement partners to obtain feedback on the land securement strategy and establish connections that facilitate future securement collaborations.
5. Form a Land Securement Working Group (comprised of land securement partners and funders) to collaborate on potential securement projects. The group should meet a minimum of annually.
6. Collaborate with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation to develop and implement a stewardship fund.
7. Collaborate with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation to launch fundraising campaign(s) for land securement.
8. Proactively seek funding opportunities and explore the feasibility of non-conventional funding options for securement projects.

The next steps for implementation of the Land Securement Strategy in 2022 are to:

- consult with municipal partners, land trusts, Indigenous organizations, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation, and Public Advisory Committee for feedback on the strategy and to build relationships toward future land securement;
- develop policies that guide decision-making regarding land acquisition and disposition, as per *Conservation Authorities Act* O. Reg 686/21 (Sec. 9 (2)(vi)); and
- develop a land securement program including a budget, outreach and engagement plan and associated materials, landowner contact list, and allocating staff resources.

Financial Implications:

The costs associated with land securement can vary greatly depending on the property and method of securement. There are numerous ways to fund land securement projects including municipal and other partnerships, government grants, and fundraising campaigns, among others. However, to access funding and successfully secure lands, it is imperative to fund a land securement program. For a successful and effective land securement program, an annual budget will be required to cover the associated costs of implementation (e.g., staff time, outreach materials, appraisal, assessment fees, etc.), as determined by an annual review by staff. Following endorsement by the Board of Directors, staff will develop a preliminary annual costing and work with partners to discuss financing options.

Links to Policy/Strategic Plan:

The NPCA strategic plan calls for the development and implementation of a land acquisition strategy to achieve Goal 1.4: “*Manage lands to increase biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and natural cover*”.

Implementing a land securement strategy will also directly support achieving Goal 3.1 “*Create equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people*” as well as several other NPCA strategic goals and performance measures related to natural hazard protection, ecosystem improvements, and building relationships with partners, stakeholders, and Indigenous peoples.

Related Reports and Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Land Securement Strategy 2022-2032

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