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## **Newmarket Contribution to Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas**

### **Staff Report to Council**

Report Number: 2025-04

Department(s): Parks and Facility Services

Author(s): Jeff Payne, Commissioner of Community Services

Meeting Date: February 3, 2025

### **Recommendations**

1. That the report entitled Newmarket Contribution to Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database dated February 3, 2025 be received; and,
2. That the woodlot parcel in the northwest quadrant (north of Environmental Park) be approved for review and analysis as part of the Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP) for eligibility determination and inclusion to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD); and,
3. That the Commissioner of Community Services be authorized to execute any agreements or documents that are necessary to give effect to this resolution including, without limitation, any agreement or documents related approvals and registration of said lands in CPCAD; and,
4. That Staff be directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution; and,
5. That staff report back to Council on the outcome and findings of the project.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to enter into an agreement with Ontario Nature to assess the Town owned woodlot lands north of Environmental Park in the northwest quadrant (excluding Environmental Park proper and York Region Forest Lands along the boundary with East Gwillimbury) to confirm that the ecological value of the natural features meet the requirements for inclusion in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database.

This effort is aligned with environmental priorities set by Council and will also contribute to international commitments made by Canada to preserve and protect environmentally significant lands. Protecting these lands contributes to efforts to take action to address climate change at the local level while simultaneously supporting global targets.

Contributing to CPCAD is an opportunity to recognize Newmarket's ongoing commitment to the environment while simultaneously supporting a broader effort.

## **Background**

In December of 2022, the City of Montreal hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties on the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-15). This conference ratified an international agreement to protect at least 30% of land and 30% of inland waters, coastal areas and oceans by 2030 (often referred to simply as 30x30), in support of biodiversity and ecological function. Canada is a signatory to this international agreement. In addition, at COP-15 the City of Montreal invited cities around the world to join the Montreal Pledge (Cities United in Action for Biodiversity) that challenges cities to register municipally owned eligible lands to count toward the 30x30 target.

Ontario Nature is working to support achieving targets through the Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP). Through the MPAP, Ontario Nature is supporting municipalities across Ontario to identify lands that meet the criteria of CPCAD. Ontario Nature is a not-for-profit organization that has the expertise and funding to conduct the necessary assessments at no cost to the Town. Specific to Newmarket, Ontario Nature will conduct an ecological assessment to confirm the Town owned woodlot lands in the northwest quadrant meet the requirements for registration in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD). If successful, this parcel of woodlot lands will contribute toward achieving Canada's 30x30 target.

From a process point of view, the assessment of the lands is completed by Ontario Nature. The eligibility determination will then be submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) for review. Once approved by MECP the file is submitted to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) for final approval and registration to CPCAD.

In Ontario other municipalities have already participated in this program including the City of Richmond Hill, the City of Hamilton, City of Sudbury and the City of Windsor. The City of Brampton is another example, they have registered nearly 2,000 hectares of land in the database, essentially their entire natural heritage valley systems. Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) has also had lands added to CPCAD, all being examples that are contributing toward the 30x30 target.

## **Discussion**

Ontario Nature is working with municipalities and the Ontario Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks (MECP) to assess lands with ecological value to determine if

they can be added to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD). Ecological areas added to the database count toward achieving the target of protecting 30% of land and 30% of inland water, coastal waters and oceans by 2030 (referred to as 30x30). Ontario Nature approached Newmarket staff about the woodlot parcel north of Environmental Park as a candidate for inclusion in CPCAD.

An evaluation of the parcel is required and would be undertaken as part of the Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP) which is administered by Ontario Nature with funding from the Greenbelt Foundation and the Government of Canada. The Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada have actively contributed (and continue to contribute) lands to CPCAD, this project is focused on adding lands owned by municipalities in an expanded effort to achieve targets. The evaluation of land is required to determine if the lands qualify as 'Protected Areas' or as 'Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures' (OECM). If the lands are determined to qualify, they fall into one of two classifications:

1. **Protected Area** – the lands are owned by a public body specifically with the intent to protect biodiversity and ecosystem function; these are lands we would associate with high ecological value (example – a nature reserve or a conservation area).
2. **Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures** – lands that are managed to achieve positive long-term outcomes for conservation; this is the classification that the parcel in Newmarket would align with (example – natural feature such as a wetland or woodlot of significance).

Ontario Nature has conducted a preliminary screening of the northwest quadrant woodlot parcel (the parcel) in Newmarket based on the MPAP evaluation process and believes the parcel meets the OECM eligibility (the lands would not be assessed as a Protected Area). The evaluation considers four criteria, that are outlined as follows:

1. Clearly defined boundaries – the parcel has a boundary that is established by the woodlot natural heritage feature. The boundary of the parcel is defined and there is clear ownership of abutting properties (required: has spatial boundaries).
2. Effective means to control all activities likely to negatively impact biodiversity – approved activities on this parcel are recreational based on a passive trail system, this use does not negatively impact biodiversity. The Town's Parks Bylaw regulates the use of all Newmarket park lands and provides staff with the ability to control activities on the property. The currently permitted activities on the parcel are permissible for lands included in CPCAD (demonstrates we have means to address non compatible activity – we have enforcement staff).
3. Protection is long-term, year-round and difficult to reverse – the parcel is designated Natural Heritage System in the Town's Official Plan 2006 (OP). It is specifically designated as a woodlot on Schedule B (Natural Heritage System) of

the OP. With respect to protections, the OP policies state that development and site alteration are not permitted in woodlots. The OP also includes trail construction policies. Parts of the parcel are also subject to the floodplain overlay which is regulated by Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA). Finally, these lands are also designated as a Woodland in the Regional Greenland System in the York Region Official Plan. Their policies speak to similar protections as the Town's OP.

4. Managed by governing authorities so that conservation outcomes are achieved – Newmarket has many initiatives that support conservation outcomes, such as dealing with invasive species, tree planting to increase the Town's tree canopy and protection of natural features through the OP. The Town's trail system is developed with careful consideration of the environment, regulation and in consultation with subject matter experts.

Based on an initial screening by Ontario Nature using the above noted criteria it is likely that the parcel would qualify as an OECM and therefore eligible to be added to CPCAD.

From the Town's perspective, there is no management change to the parcel resulting from being added to CPCAD, for clarity:

- The Town remains the property owner;
- The Town retains all decision-making over land use and policies;
- There is no new layer of provincial or federal regulation that applies;
- There is no requirement to undertake additional land management activities;
- Current recreational activities continue to be permitted;
- Future trail development is permitted; and
- The Town is not subject to new approval requirements to develop trails.

The stipulation set out by ECCC regarding activities on lands in CPCAD reads as follows:

“An activity is clearly compatible if it can be demonstrated to not adversely impact the in-situ conservation of the site, or if it is needed to maintain or restore ecological integrity.”

Passive trails are permitted as they are not deemed detrimental, and they have the added benefit of increasing public awareness and appreciation for natural areas. What would not be permitted, as an example, would be if the Town were to allow off road motor vehicles such as snowmobiles, ATVs or dirt bikes. These types of machines are not permitted currently on this parcel and are in fact prohibited on all trails in the Town. Further, the above noted stipulation by ECCC does allow for access, as needed, to conduct necessary works on the parcel that support conservation or trail development.

In return for adding lands to CPCAD, the Town of Newmarket will be recognized for its environmental leadership demonstrated through its commitment to protect biodiversity while simultaneously contributing to the national and global target of 30x30. The Newmarket Contribution to Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas

motivation behind the global target of 30x30 is a response to numerous ecological pressures that are impacting the natural environment, some of which includes:

- Loss or degradation of habitat and ecosystems
- Loss or decline in natural diversity of animals, insects and plants/trees
- Reduction in water quality and quantity
- Related/interrelated impacts to climate change

The benefits of supporting the 30x30 initiative at the local level includes:

- Physical and mental health wellness benefits for residents through access to natural spaces
- Opportunities to increase public environmental awareness through education and interaction with nature
- Advancing/aligning with Council environmental priorities
- Acting locally to address a problem that is global

There is a requirement for the Town to sign a letter of consent to submit the lands to CPCAD. The process recognizes that not all OECMs will be in place forever, and as such lands can be removed from CPCAD by the Town or the MECP if land use or management were to change. This is entirely a voluntary process.

## **Consultation**

This report has been developed in consultation with Newmarket Parks and Facility Services, Planning and Building Services, Legal Services, and Engineering Services. Staff have also consulted with Ontario Nature, the Ontario Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks (MECP) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and various contributing municipalities and conservation authorities.

## **Conclusion**

Including the Town owned woodlot located in the northwest quadrant in CPCAD is an opportunity for Newmarket to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to the local environment in support of sustainable biodiversity and ecological systems. It is also an opportunity to contribute to the Government of Canada target of protecting 30% of land and 30% of inland water, coastal waters and oceans by 2030 (referred to as 30x30).

## **Council Priority Association**

This report aligns with the following Council Priority: Environmental Sustainability

## **Human Resource Considerations**

No additional Human Resource considerations.

## **Budget Impact**

No additional Budget impacts.

## **Attachments**

**Attachment 1** – Map of woodlot located in the northwest quadrant of Newmarket.

## **Approval for Submission**

Ian McDougall, CAO

## **Report Contact**

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