



The Corporation of the Town of Tecumseh

Community & Recreation Services

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Beth Gignac, Director Community & Recreation Services

Date to Council: Tuesday, May 13, 2025

Report Number: CRS-2025-07

Subject: Fairplay Woods – Ontario Conservation Accelerator Letter of Understanding

Recommendations

It is recommended:

That Report CRS-2025-07 Fairplay Woods – Ontario Conservation Accelerator Letter of Understanding **be received**;

And that Administration **be authorized** to develop a Letter of Understanding with the Ontario Conservation Accelerator to prepare a conservation and recreational use plan for Fairplay Woods;

And further that an easement agreement **be developed** to facilitate site access to Fairplay Woods;

And furthermore that Administration **report back to Council** for consideration of approval of the Letter of Understanding prior to commencing the planning phase and the Easement Agreement once it is negotiated.

Background

On November 23, 2024, members of Administration met with members of the Schad Foundation, the Ontario Conservation Accelerator and the Essex County Regional Conservation Authority onsite at Fairplay Woods to determine its suitability for a formal

conservation and recreational use plan. Whilst an assessment of suitability was underway, it was brought to Administration's attention that hunting activity was occurring at Fairplay Woods and the adjacent right of way.

At the Regular Council Meeting of March 11, 2025 report [CRS-2025-04 Fairplay Woods Update](#) approved signage and enforcement penalties concerning protection of the property (RCM:69/25). Administration has since implemented the recommendations of that report.

Comments

Fairplay Woods is 51.2 hectares (126.4 acres) of Carolinian Forest. The site is bordered on the west by a closed section of the 12th Concession. The other sides abut agricultural fields, except for the extreme south of the site, which is adjacent to a disturbed meadow. The west side is bordered by the Pike Creek municipal drain and creek side vegetation.

The area is part of the Natural Heritage System and is designated Natural Environment in the Town's Official Plan adopted by Council on February 23, 2021, and approved by the County of Essex on June 21, 2021.

The 8.094 hectares (20 acres) of the Town's property on the north side of the woodlot are designated as Restoration Opportunities Overlay in the Town's Official Plan and are currently leased, on an annual basis, for agricultural use. The Town does not currently have public access to these lands.

Concurrent to the implementation of the asset protections recommendations approved through CRS-2025-04, Administration have continued discussions with the Ontario Conservation Accelerator to establish a new natural park at Fairplay Woods that would encompass both the existing woodlot and a naturalized restoration of the agricultural section. To accommodate a new natural park, site access will need to be addressed. Administration will need to negotiate an easement with the private property owner to the east of the site.

The Ontario Conservation Accelerator has offered to fund the development of a plan for the site that would consider the way enhanced recreational and educational experiences could be provided at Fairplay Woods while ensuring conservation and restoration efforts are realized.

This report recommends that the Town develop a Letter of Understanding with the Ontario Conservation Accelerator to provide funding, expertise and leadership for the following undertakings:

Phase 1: Planning

This phase will be funded by the Ontario Conservation Accelerator and includes:
Engagement – co-host stakeholder and community engagement sessions to inform the planning phase.

Conservation Plan – members of Administration and other stakeholders such as the Essex Region Conservation Authority would review existing conservation requirements for the existing woodlot.

Restoration Plan – engage a restoration consultant to create a restoration plan to convert the agricultural area to natural cover including estimated costs and timelines.

Site and Use Plan – design an overall site plan including a trail system, site access, site amenities and estimated costs and timelines.

Phase 2: Implementation

On Council approval of the plans, the Ontario Conservation Accelerator would also provide expertise for implementation as follows:

- Trail building to ensure protection of habitat
- Interpretative and Way Finding Signage
- Restoration of the agricultural site
- Oversight of contractors for various work
- Connections to additional funding both government and philanthropic

The Ontario Conservation Accelerator may also provide funding support for some aspects of the implementation, pending cost estimates which will be determined during the planning process.

For this work to be undertaken, the Town would be required to provide access to the site which will necessitate an easement agreement with the property owner of the agricultural lands to the immediate east of the property. Further, the Town will need to consider public access to the site as part of the site plan process.

The agricultural section of the property has been leased for the 2025 growing season and this work will not interfere with those operations.

Next Steps

On approval, Administration will commence work on the following items:

- Develop the Letter of Understanding with the Ontario Conservation Accelerator for the phases outlined above.
- Negotiate an easement agreement with the neighbouring landowner.
- Report back to Council on the Letter of Understanding prior to commencing the planning phase and the Easement Agreement, once negotiated.

Consultations

Chief Administrative Officer
Legislative Services & Clerk
Public Works & Engineering Services
The Ontario Conservation Accelerator

Financial Implications

The Ontario Conservation Accelerator has committed to provide funding to support the planning aspects of the project. The Ontario Conservation Accelerator may also provide funding support towards some elements of the implementation, pending cost estimates which will be determined during the planning process. The Letter of Understanding will codify these commitments.

There is no financial implication to the Town for the planning process. Future financial considerations for implementation will be brought forward through the conservation and use plan and the annual budget process.

Link to Strategic Priorities

Applicable	2023-2026 Strategic Priorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sustainable Growth: Achieve prosperity and a livable community through sustainable growth.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Community Health and Inclusion: Integrate community health and inclusion into our places and spaces and everything we do.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Service Experience: Enhance the experience of Team Tecumseh and our citizens through responsive and respectful service.

Communications

Not applicable ☒

Website ☐

Social Media ☐

News Release ☐

Local Newspaper ☐

This report has been reviewed by Senior Administration as indicated below and recommended for submission by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Prepared by:

Beth Gignac, BA Hons
Director Community & Recreation Services

Reviewed by:

Phil Bartnik, P.Eng.
Director Public Works & Engineering Services

Reviewed by:

Robert Auger, LL.B.
Director Legislative Services & Clerk

Recommended by:

Margaret Misek-Evans, MCIP, RPP
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment Number	Attachment Name
None	None