

Land Trust Implementation Plan – Public Consultation Process

Recommendation:

That Administration work with the Edmonton Land Trust to ensure that the City’s interests will be protected in any future agreement with the City, and report back to Transportation and Public Works Committee by the end of September 2006.

Report Summary

This information report summarizes the public consultation process work that was undertaken by Administration from January to May 2006, to support the establishment of a land trust to conserve natural areas.

Previous Committee Action

At the October 26, 2005, Executive Committee meeting the following motion was passed:

1. That the September 28, 2005, Planning and Development Department report 2005PDP019 be received for information.
2. That the consultation process be organized by a neutral, skilled consultant hired by Administration with the advisement of the Natural Areas Advisory Committee (NAAC), as detailed in Option 2 of the September 28, 2005, Planning and Development Department report 2005PDP019.
3. The Administration prepare a consultation report for Executive Committee.

Report

- The City contracted The Dagny Partnership to conduct the consultation program which consisted of:

1. A full day workshop with 15 stakeholders from 14 different organizations.
 2. Four randomly selected focus groups of the general public from all four quarters of the City.
 3. A review of publicly available, public attitude research on related topics.
 4. Interviews with funding agencies, influencers, and the Executive Director of the Western Sky Land Trust.
- The formal part of the consultation process was conducted between January 1 and February 15, 2006. Many informal conversations between the participants were undertaken in the weeks following this period.

Key Findings:

- There is strong support for a land trust to focus on natural areas conservation.
- The appropriate mission and purpose of the land trust should be a focus on land preservation or conservation of the region’s unique habitat and biodiversity.
- The formulation of the final mission and principles for the land trust should be the responsibility of a Board of Directors.

Guiding Principles:

The stakeholders’ workshop produced five principles to help guide the creation of a land trust. Their opinion was that a land trust for Edmonton should:

- Seek long-term security for land conservation using many planning and land conservation tools.

- Use a multi-stakeholder public and/or private collaborative partnership approach that achieves cost effective and productive results.
- Consist of open, transparent and accountable management.
- Be fiscally sustainable – raising funds and securing long-term financial commitments from public and private sources.
- Exhibit environmental stewardship and conservation based on best-practice approaches and public access to the natural spaces or education and enjoyment.

Regional Approach Preferred:

The majority of those consulted supported in principle the idea that an independent land trust need not be constrained to operate within the boundaries of Edmonton. Stakeholders, the general public, and funding agencies felt that the scope of interest should extend to the Greater Edmonton area and include those lands further away from development pressure closer the urban core.

Role of the City:

There was no consensus on the appropriate role for the City. Although there was support for the City to be represented on the Board, it was not clear whether the representation should be from Council or Administration. There was a minority view that the City should not be represented on the Board.

Strong Support for Start-up Funding:

There was very strong support from the public for the City providing funds in the

range of \$275,000 annually for three years to support the organization in its initial start-up phase.

Service in Kind:

The following organizations expressed interest in the City of Edmonton providing services and support of their membership in various ways:

- Alberta Riparian Management Society
- Canadian Wildlife Service
- Canadian Federation of University Women's Association
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Environmental Law Centre
- King Motion Pictures
- Sierra Club of Canada

A New Land Trust is Formed:

After the main organized consultation process was completed, the Office of Natural Areas organized a meeting that was held on April 26 to discuss the possibility of forming a land trust. The following community groups attended the initial meeting:

- Ducks Unlimited Canada (conservation)
- Edmonton Community Foundation (philanthropy)
- Land Stewardship Centre of Canada (conservation)
- Legacy Lands Conservation Society (conservation)
- Urban Development Institute (land development)

At the meeting, the parties agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to start a new organization and seek signatories. It was decided that the issue of

City involvement would be discussed with the City after the MOU had been signed.

On May 18, 2006, the City received a signed MOU and business plan from:

- Edmonton Community Foundation (philanthropy)
- Land Stewardship Centre of Canada (conservation)
- Legacy Lands Conservation Society (conservation)
- Urban Development Institute (land development)
- Edmonton Natural Club

The signatories of the new organization have sent a letter to the City asking for the following:

- An immediate cash grant of \$275,000, to help cover the first year's operating expenses.
- A \$2.5 million endowment, which would be placed with the Edmonton Community Foundation to help cover the land trust's annual operating costs so that ongoing city financial support would not be required.

The business plan explains in more detail the goals, operational objectives, governance and development of the land trust. It is the goal of the land trust to eventually serve the Edmonton region. To accomplish this goal, the trust will seek financial support from regional agencies and organizations.

A formal endowment deed will be established with the Edmonton Community Foundation by June 30, 2006, so that the land trust can begin receiving endowment

contributions. The trust will be incorporated before the end of the year and an application will be made for charitable status.

Initial Observations and Actions:

- The community consultation process resulted in a new community-based partnership proposal from five organizations that represent the philanthropic significantly, natural areas conservation, and land development communities in Edmonton.
- Administration has not budgeted for this proposal in 2006; however, the Administration has created a service package to potentially fund a land trust in the amount of \$275,000 per year for three years as proposed at the July 13, 2005 Executive Committee meeting.
- Administration views this proposal as an excellent first step towards the creation of an Edmonton land trust; however, additional work is required to understand their proposal and come to an informed opinion regarding their proposal and recommend any further action to Transportation and Public Works Committee.
- Before Administration can provide a recommendation to TPW Committee, Administration needs to undertake a review of the proposal that considers but is not limited to the following issues and concerns:
 - Measures to ensure that the land trust will focus on acquisition of land within Edmonton.
 - How acquired lands and conservation easements will be managed and maintained in perpetuity.

- Will or how will the public be allowed to access acquired properties.
- Potential impacts to the tax base;
- The role of the City in the governance structure of the land trust.
- Whether the new land trust will align itself with City conservation goals and other initiatives.
- The appropriateness of the proposed scope of the activities of the land trust (e.g. natural areas, cultural heritage lands, agricultural lands).
- Administration’s opinion is that the best way forward at this point is to work with the “Edmonton Land Trust” to ensure that the City’s interests will be protected in any future agreement before discussing this proposal in greater detail with Transportation and Public Works Committee.

Justification of Recommendation

The recommended action will help to protect the City’s strategic and financial interests and aid in Council’s decision with respect to the “Edmonton Land Trust’s” proposal.

Background Information Available on Request

1. A detailed version of the results of the public consultation process is available from the Office of Natural Areas.