

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Planning, Development, and Legislative Services**  
**Community Planning**

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**To:** Planning and Works Committee  
**Meeting Date:** June 6, 2023  
**Report Title:** rare Charitable Research Reserve – Funding Agreement

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**1. Recommendation**

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo extend the Funding Agreement with the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve for an additional five-year period requiring a contribution of \$50,000 annually over the next five years (2023 – 2027) as outlined in PDL-CPL-23-014 dated June 6, 2023.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

To request Council endorsement to extend a funding partnership.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

The collaborative funding arrangement helps achieve Strategic Objective 3 Environment and Climate Action, specifically actions: 3.2 Improve resilience to climate change and/or severe weather; and 3.5 Promote the efficient use of urban land, and protect and enhance agricultural and natural areas. It also advances our strategic imperatives including: balancing rural and urban communities; fostering partnerships; taking climate action; and efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

**4. Report Highlights:**

- The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve (*rare*) is a registered charity, environmental research institute, and land trust (*raresites*) based in Waterloo Region and Wellington County. It manages extensive ecologically significant properties centred around their primary land holdings at the heart of the Blair-Bechtel-Cruickston Environmentally Sensitive Landscape (ESL), totalling over 980 acres of conservation lands throughout the Region.
- *rare* provides educational environmental stewardship programmes to school children and youth, and hosts environmental scientists in support of an ambitious research mandate. For two decades, *rare* has been a living laboratory for research into significant environmental concerns.

- The Region piloted a successful five-year Funding Agreement with **rare** (Report PDL-CPL-16-34, dated August 9, 2016) that provided funding to support over 2017-2021 for:
  - environmental research related to Regional interests;
  - stewardship activities on land trust properties within Waterloo Region;
  - operation of the Land Trust (e.g., property acquisition costs such as legal, planning fees, surveys, property demarcation, oversight); and,
  - institutional capacity building.

This agreement was extended by an additional year in 2022.

- This contribution agreement funds activities complementing Regional environmental and stewardship initiatives, including research related to the monitoring and conservation of the Greenlands Network, support for the work of a multi-property conservation land trust, and stewardship on conservation lands, as outlined in report PDL-CPL-23-014, dated June 6th, 2023.
- Staff recommend extending the Collaborative Funding Agreement for an additional 5 years (2023 – 2027). The Region’s annual contribution of \$50,000 is included in the 2023 operating budget funded from the property tax levy.

## 5. Background:

The rare Charitable Research Reserve (**rare**) is a land trust and environmental institute operating in the Region of Waterloo since 2001. The original property area of 902 acres is located near the Village of Blair and south end of Kitchener. The organization has been protecting and stewarding this ecologically significant land and natural area for 20 years, bringing an innovative model of Conservation, Research, and Education to the community.

A unique institution in Waterloo Region, **rare** combines environmental research with outreach to citizens and stewardship of a land trust property at the heart of one of the Region’s Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes. **rare** is well positioned to build environmental research in the Region and support sustainability and conservation efforts as economic development and population growth accelerate. The organization is a certified living wage employer, with 14 permanent full-time staff and a changing range of research fellows, visiting artists and summer students. Every year, **rare** engages over 200 volunteers. In total, 150 research projects have been conducted and over 31,000 pounds of organically grown foods donated to local food banks since the inception of these important programs. In addition, nearly 20,000 students have visited **rare’s** Every Child Outdoors education program.

The pilot five-year Funding Agreement launched in 2016 between **rare** and the Region has been very successful and has resulted in:

- the formation of a local multi-property land trust, the ***raresites*** Land Securement Group;
- a comprehensive five-year Land Securement Strategy to guide conservation land acquisition across the Region and Wellington County and build a network of protected areas of high ecological significance and connectivity;
- within Waterloo Region, four completed land securement projects (including two EcoGift land donations and a Conservation Easement on Barrie's Lake, totalling over 80 acres of new conservation lands), and significant progress on another four EcoGift land donations totalling over 465 acres of future conservation lands;
- a review of and update to ***rare's*** Regionally significant long-term research and monitoring program, which quantifies biodiversity and develops and test methods for monitoring multiple aspects of the natural environment through formal and citizen-led programs; and,
- research on the impacts of micro-plastics and the potential for implementation of a local Alternative Land Use Systems (ALUS) program.

The establishment of the ***raresites*** Land Securement Group is fulfilling the intent of ROP policy 7.I.11, "the establishment of a Land Trust to hold, purchase and manage elements of the Greenlands Network, or to hold conservation easements." While municipal official plan policies may prohibit inappropriate land uses in natural features, a land trust provides additional value as it brings significant natural heritage properties under informed stewardship and involves volunteers from the community in the care and stewardship of such properties at little or no public expense. Properties in a land trust are also often more readily available for research and teaching opportunities for ecological restoration and stewardship techniques.

## **6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**

### **Area Municipalities:**

Lands held in trust and the research conducted at ***rare*** are of interest and benefit to Area Municipalities as well as the Region. Fostering the growth of a multi-property land trust will help conserve significant natural areas in various parts of the Region.

### **Public:**

The ***raresites*** Land Securement Group includes representatives from Area Municipalities, Six Nations, the Grand River Conservation Authority, academic institutions, and environmental/naturalists organizations.

## **7. Financial Implications:**

The approved 2023 Community Planning operating budget includes a provision of \$50,000 for this work, which is funded by the Region's property tax levy. A five-year

extension to the Collaborative Funding Agreement would require a total Regional contribution of \$250,000 over the next five years.

## **8. Conclusion / Next Steps:**

Future collaborative work planned includes:

- implementing and updating the Land Securement Strategy as a means to build a network of conservation lands that will support the Region's climate change resilience and adaptive strategies, environmental research, increased biodiversity, and passive recreation for a growing population;
- continuing to seek out and support individual land securement projects (current potential donations total more than 450 acres, with an expected appraised value of at least \$3.5 million);
- providing sustainable management of each conservation property;
- further exploring the potential for Waterloo Region to be an Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) community and/or other ways to support farmers that protect and manage ecological services on their properties; and
- continuing Regionally significant research and monitoring projects.

## **9. Attachments:**

Nil

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**Approved By:** Rod Regier, Commissioner, Planning Development and Legislative Services