

Subject: Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program 2021-2025 Review and Renewal

File Number: ACS2026-SI-CCR-0004

Report to Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee on 2 April 2026

and Council 8 April 2026

Submitted on March 24, 2026 by Nichole Hoover-Bienasz, Director, Climate Change and Resiliency, Strategic Initiatives

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Ward: Citywide

Objet : Examen et renouvellement du Programme d'assainissement de l'eau en milieu rural d'Ottawa 2021-2025

Numéro de dossier : ACS2026-SI-CCR-0004

Rapport présenté au Comité de l'agriculture et des affaires rurales le 2 avril 2026

et au Conseil le 8 avril 2026

Soumis le 24 mars 2026 par Nichole Hoover-Bienasz, Directeur, Services des changements climatiques et de la résilience, Direction générale des initiatives stratégiques

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Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee recommend that Council:

- 1. Receive the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program 2021-2025 Review and Renewal (Document 1);**
- 2. Approve the 2026-2030 Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program as outlined in this report and as described in Document 1;**
- 3. Direct staff to undertake further study and consultation on expanding the scope of the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program, as outlined in this report and as described in Document 1, and to report back to Council in 2027.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité de l'agriculture et des affaires rurales recommande ce qui suit au Conseil :

- 1. Prendre connaissance de l'examen et du renouvellement du Programme d'assainissement de l'eau en milieu rural d'Ottawa 2021-2025 (document 1);**
- 2. Approuver le Programme d'assainissement de l'eau en milieu rural d'Ottawa 2026-2030, comme l'explique ce rapport et comme le précise le document 1;**
- 3. Enjoindre au personnel de mener des études et des consultations supplémentaires sur l'élargissement de la portée du Programme d'assainissement de l'eau en milieu rural d'Ottawa, comme indiqué dans le présent rapport et décrit dans le document 1, et de rendre compte au Conseil en 2027.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assumption and Analysis

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program (ORCWP) is a City-funded stewardship program that is delivered in partnership with local Conservation Authorities. This Program is reviewed and renewed on a 5-year cycle to allow for regular monitoring of outcomes, to ensure program relevance, and to support continuous improvement. The ORCWP was last reviewed and renewed in 2021, and Council approval is required to continue offering the Program for the 2026-2030 period.

Financial Implications

The ORCWP has an annual budget of \$200,000 and is funded by the City through a special levy to South Nation Conservation, the lead Conservation Authority for program administration and delivery. This report recommends maintaining the budget at \$200,000 annually and continuing funding through the special levy.

Public Consultation/Input

Key interest holders, including Conservation Authority partners, Program Committee members, Review Committee members, and City of Ottawa staff, were given the opportunity to provide feedback by means of a verbal interview or using an online questionnaire. Interest holders shared insights related to the Program's goals, administration and delivery, data collection and management, promotion and communications, committee structures, and project categories and eligibility.

Program participants were invited to share their feedback through an online survey following project completion and grant payment. Participants shared their experiences with the Program, their reasons for completing projects, and the benefits that they observed. They also suggested improvements in how the Program is delivered, administered and promoted.

RÉSUMÉ

Hypothèse et analyse

Le Programme d'assainissement de l'eau en milieu rural d'Ottawa (PAEMRO) est un programme de gestion financé par la Ville et mis en œuvre en partenariat avec les offices de protection de la nature de la région. Ce programme est révisé et renouvelé tous les cinq ans afin de permettre un suivi régulier des résultats, de garantir sa pertinence et de favoriser son amélioration constante. Le PAEMRO a été révisé et renouvelé pour la dernière fois en 2021, et l'approbation du Conseil est nécessaire pour poursuivre sa mise en œuvre au cours de la période 2026-2030.

Répercussions financières

Disposant d'un budget annuel de 200 000 \$, le PAEMRO est financé par la Ville par le biais d'une subvention spéciale versée à Conservation de la Nation-Sud, le principal office de protection de la nature chargée de la gestion et de la mise en œuvre du programme. Le présent rapport recommande de maintenir le budget à 200 000 \$ par an et de poursuivre le financement par le biais de la subvention spéciale.

Consultation et commentaires du public

Les principales parties intéressées, notamment les offices de protection de la nature partenaires, les membres du Comité du Programme et des comités de révision et le personnel de la Ville d'Ottawa, ont eu l'occasion de donner leur avis dans le cadre d'entretiens oraux ou à l'aide d'un questionnaire en ligne. Les parties intéressées ont fait part de leurs observations concernant les objectifs du programme, son administration et sa mise en œuvre, la collecte et la gestion des données, la promotion et la communication, la structure des comités, ainsi que les catégories de projets et les critères d'admissibilité.

Les participants au programme ont été invités à soumettre leurs commentaires par le biais d'un sondage en ligne au terme de leur projet et après le versement de la subvention. Ils ont partagé leurs expériences du programme, les raisons qui les ont poussés à mener à bien leurs projets, ainsi que les avantages qu'ils en ont tirés. Ils ont également formulé des suggestions d'amélioration entourant la mise en œuvre, la gestion et la promotion du programme.

BACKGROUND

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program ([ORCWP](#)) provides cost-share grants to farmers City-wide and all rural landowners for projects that protect surface and groundwater quality. The ORCWP offers grants of up to \$15,000 for 19 project types that include agricultural best management practices, erosion control, and well decommissioning. The program is delivered in partnership with the South Nation, Rideau Valley, and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities.

Since its inception in 2000, the Program has supported over 1,600 projects with nearly \$3.3 million in grants. Landowners contributed an additional \$11.3 million towards those projects at an average rate of \$3.43 for every dollar granted by the City.

The current [Program was renewed in 2021](#) for five years with a budget of \$200,000 per year, and it is funded by the City through a special levy to South Nation Conservation. This report presents the key findings of the Program Review for the last five years (2021-2025) and proposes recommendations for a renewed Program for 2026-2030. Further details are provided in Document 1 and Document 2.

DISCUSSION

A Program Review was undertaken to evaluate the performance of the Program in terms of the following:

- Goals and objectives
- Program design, including available project types
- Program delivery, including administration, promotion, and budget
- Program governance, monitoring, and reporting

The Review also documents the Program outcomes from 2021-2025 and summarizes overall trends from similar clean water programs across the Province of Ontario.

Program Outcomes

Since 2021, the Program has supported 271 projects at a total grant value of \$671,425. Many projects reflect considerable private investment; in 2021-2025 landowners contributed more than \$1 million for a total project value of over \$1.7 million. A total of 231 individual landowners benefited from ORCWP funding over this 5-year period.

Forest and wetland management plans, natural windbreaks/watercourse buffers, erosion control, well decommissioning represented the most common project types (Figure 1). Over half of all grant funds (60%) was allocated to erosion control projects, and well decommissioning projects received 14% of funding (Figure 2). The remaining funds were allocated to natural windbreaks / watercourse buffers, forest management plans, watercourse fencing, wetland restoration, nutrient management plans/precision farming, land retirement incentives, septic system repair/replacement, cover crops, and tile drain control structures.

Figure 1: Project types from 2021-2025

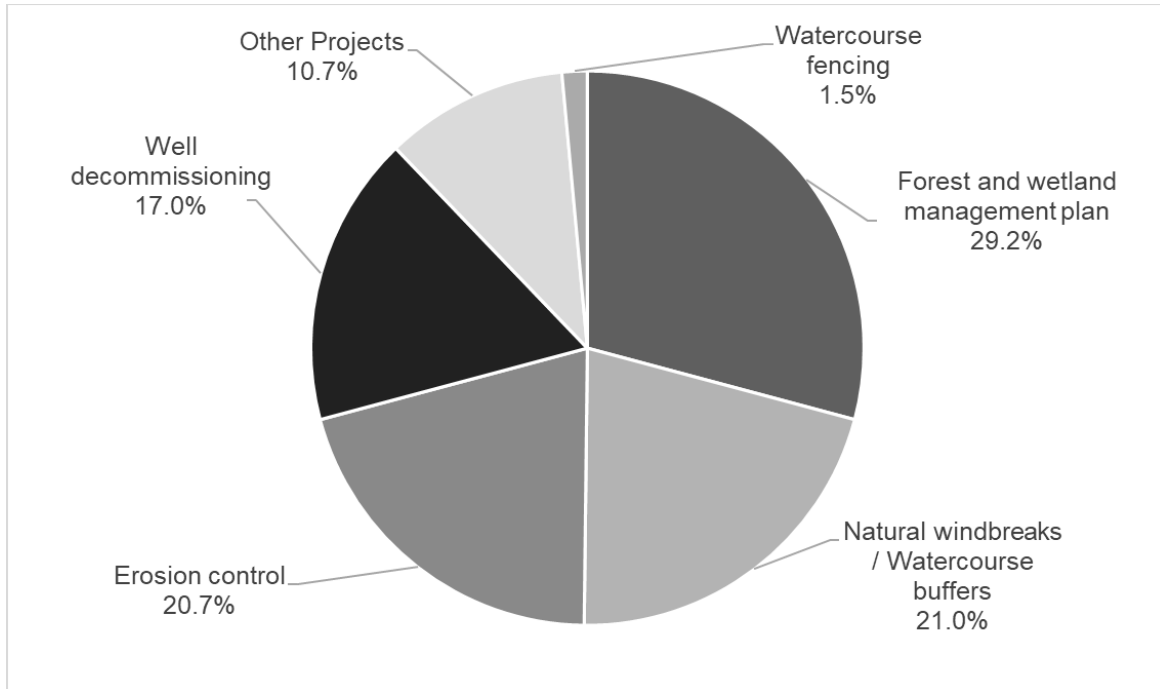
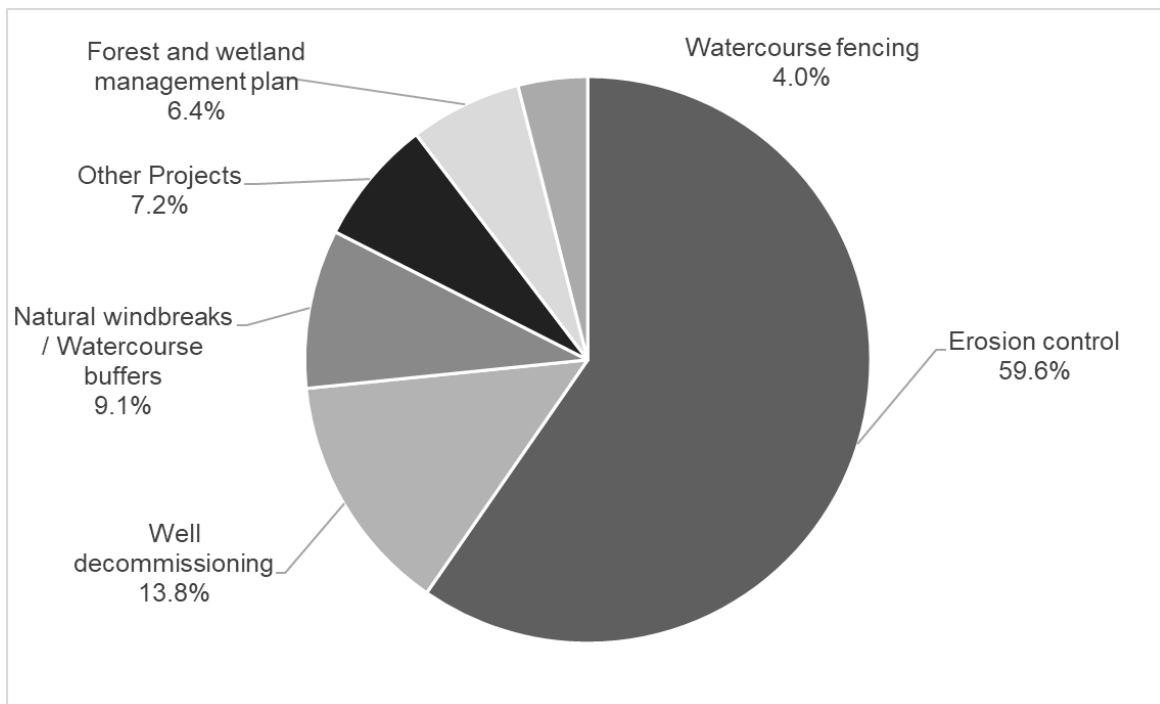


Figure 2: Grant funding allocations from 2021-2025



Projects have been undertaken across the City with most farm-based projects occurring on fertile agricultural lands. Most forest management plans were completed in areas of Ottawa with higher forest cover and less productive agricultural lands. Most erosion control projects, along with many projects to create or enhance natural windbreaks and/or watercourse buffers, were completed on rural residential properties along the Rideau River.

As a result of projects completed between 2021-2025:

- Over 50 hectares of sensitive land have been retired from agricultural production.
- Over 450 hectares of farmland have improved nutrient management with precision farming techniques and Nutrient Management Plans.
- Over 2 kilometres of streambanks have been protected from erosion.
- Over 112,000 trees have been planted along 6.9 kilometres of watercourses or natural windbreaks.
- The risks of surface and groundwater contamination at 55 sites have been reduced through well decommissioning.

Other Clean Water Programs

Overall, there is a high similarity between the ORCWP and many of the clean water programs found across Ontario in terms of projects offered and available funding. Agricultural stewardship programs for farm businesses were included as part of this review, such as ALUS Ontario East, ALUS Mississippi-Rideau, and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA)'s Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program.

One project category frequently offered by other programs but not the ORCWP includes natural habitat creation and restoration. Many programs encourage farmers and rural landowners to restore or enhance woodlands, native grasslands and meadows and to create pollinator habitat.

Well upgrading, replacement and protection is another category regularly offered by other programs. Funding for well upgrades was previously offered by the ORCWP but was discontinued in 2011 to prioritize Program resources for projects that protect water quality for the greatest public benefit.

Goals and Objectives

Protecting Ottawa's streams, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater by providing cost-share grants to landowners remains a relevant program goal. Most interest holders agree that the existing suite of projects is well-aligned with this goal.

Interest holders acknowledged that society's environmental concerns have shifted since clean water programs were implemented over 25 years ago. To remain relevant, interest holders shared the perspective that the Program should consider expanding to include projects that target water quality indirectly and/or have broader environmental sustainability benefits. This review presents an opportunity to reevaluate the program's goals and to consider broadening into areas not directly related to water quality, but that align with other Council priorities, such as climate change adaptation and resilience, environmental stewardship, and ecosystem services.

Program Design

Existing Project Types

The Review examined ways to enhance the existing suite of project types through discussions with interest holders, surveys of grant recipients, and an examination of program trends across Ontario. Ideas related to the eligibility criteria and project guidelines, aimed at improving uptake and streamlining administration, were considered for the following: septic repair/replacement, land retirement incentive, wetland restoration, natural windbreaks/watercourse buffers, and nutrient management plan/precision farming. Interest holders also shared input on adjusting available project funding amounts and grant rates in consideration of increased financial pressures, inflation, and the costs of undertaking projects for the following: septic repair/replacement, precision farming, watercourse fencing, wetland restoration, cover crops, and tile drain control structures.

Living Snow Fence Pilot

Beginning in 2024, a new project type involving the creation of living snow fences on rural properties was piloted by Rideau Valley Conservation Authority staff in partnership with the Councillor for Ward 21 (Rideau-Jock). Although their primary intent is to reduce blowing snow and improve road safety, living snow fences can help manage soil moisture, reduce soil erosion, and improve wildlife habitat.

The pilot followed best practices established by other municipalities and conservation authorities across Ontario and featured three design options consisting of trees and/or

shrubs. In 2025, initial site visits were completed for suitable properties with interested landowners, and three sites are proceeding in spring 2026. The living snow fence sites will be prepared, planted, and maintained by Conservation Authority staff and will be eligible for survival assessments, refill planting, and tending for a five-year period.

Landowners participating in the pilot will receive a land retirement incentive payment of \$700/acre/year for a minimum of 10 years to compensate for the loss of productive land and to encourage the establishment of living snow fences. The costs associated with establishing and maintaining the plantings will be entirely covered (100%) by the pilot program, with an expected maximum of \$15,000 per property (in addition to the annual incentive payment).

The living snow fence pilot has been positively received by rural landowners and continues to generate interest and participation. The ORCWP currently offers grants to rural landowners for similar stewardship projects such as fragile land retirement and natural windbreaks, and this program is well-positioned to include living snow fences as a new project type within its existing administrative framework.

Expansion of Program Scope

Expansion of the ORCWP beyond traditional water quality-focused projects to include environmental stewardship and climate change adaptation and resilience was highlighted on multiple occasions during this review by various interest holders. There is an interest in supporting private landowners with the creation and restoration of natural habitats, and Program staff noted that some landowners have expressed a desire to undertake these projects. Funding available through ALUS programs is only accessible to registered farm businesses, and this gap could be addressed through the ORCWP.

Interest holders and survey respondents proposed a variety of project types that could foster increased environmental stewardship in rural Ottawa. Examples include natural habitat improvements (e.g., pollinator strips, grassland and meadow creation) and protection for species at risk habitats (e.g., delayed hay cutting to support nesting birds). A wide range of project types were suggested to support climate change adaptation and resilience efforts. Examples include nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff (e.g., rain gardens, bioswales and bioretention ponds), agricultural adaptations (e.g., technologies and practices for soil, water and nutrient conservation, runoff management, use of drought-sensitive crops, and stormwater irrigation ponds), and extreme weather preparedness (e.g., preparing properties for flooding, wildland fires, drought, large storm events, power outages, and livestock evacuation).

Respondents acknowledged that incentives to support rural landowners to undertake environmental stewardship or climate change adaptation and resiliency projects could be achieved through various mechanisms. One approach could involve refocusing or enhancing existing ORCWP materials to highlight relevant links. The addition of brand-new project types or separate funding streams would involve comprehensive program planning before launching.

Supporting incentives to adapt to changing climate conditions would require collaboration across several City departments. Any expansions to the ORCWP would need to complement existing climate-related programs and align with Council-approved strategies such as Climate Ready Ottawa, the Climate Change Master Plan, the Infrastructure Master Plan, and the Stormwater Retrofit Program.

Administration

The ORCWP is administered by the South Nation, Rideau Valley, and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities with the support of Review Committees comprised of local farmers and landowners. Using a streamlined delivery approach, projects are also identified and administered through partnerships with Green Acres (the City's rural tree planting program) and the Conservation Authorities' shoreline naturalization programs. The Program has the flexibility to collaborate, where feasible, with other complementary rural stewardship programs such as ALUS Ontario East, ALUS Mississippi-Rideau, the OSCIA's Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program, and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Feedback from a survey of program participants was extremely positive, with 89 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with the Program's administration and promptness in application approvals. Interest holders proposed several ideas to further enhance the administration and delivery of the Program, including minor updates for funding pre-requisites, clarifications and simplifications to the online application form and program materials, and an increase of the funding limit per property to offer more flexibility to landowners.

Promotion and Outreach

The Program is promoted using a range of methods including print, social media, attendance at fairs and events, distribution of partner signs, and presentations. Postcards are delivered to rural homeowners, ads are published in local newspapers, announcements are made through the City's Rural Connections and Councillor newsletters, and social media articles are posted. Program staff participated in 26 rural fairs and events, including the Ottawa Valley Farm Show, the Eastern Ontario Crop

Conference, and Eco Farm Day. Many in-person events and conferences were cancelled during the 2021-2025 period, and targeted promotional activities such as demonstration projects and presentations to agricultural groups were curtailed, largely due to restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these on-going efforts to diversify promotion and outreach, over half of grant recipients surveyed indicated that the ORCWP is not effectively promoted. Promotion and outreach are challenging given the geographic extent of the City and the diversity of landowners and project types. Interest holders felt that more promotion would be beneficial and emphasized the importance of different touchpoints while also recognizing the limits to what can be achieved on a modest budget.

A broad range of suggestions were proposed, by interest holders and grant recipients alike, to improve overall promotion and communications. Ideas included shifting towards larger signage in highly visible locations, focusing messaging on targeted or feature projects with high impact, increasing targeted advertising campaigns on social media and non-conventional media platforms, and hosting local forums, events, or workshops to showcase a farm or past project where landowners can learn from the experiences of program participants. Additional details and other ideas for improving the promotion of the Program are highlighted in Document 1.

Budget

Total ORCWP funding for 2021 to 2025 was \$1,153,571, including \$153,571 in funding carried forward from the 2020 program for approved projects and an annual special levy to South Nation Conservation of \$200,000 across 5 years.

Total ORCWP expenses from 2021-2025 were \$893,857, including grants and program delivery expenses. Program delivery expenses were 26 per cent of total expenditures (\$230,866). The remaining balance of \$259,714 includes \$142,262 in funding that is encumbered for approved projects that have not yet been completed.

Over the 2021-2025 period, \$117,452 in funding was not allocated towards any projects or program delivery expenses. The reduced uptake for available funding can be attributed to several factors such as limited promotion and communications, contractor availability and supply chain impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, cost increases for projects, and overall budget pressures on household finances. The surplus includes nearly \$58,500 in funding for 11 applications that were withdrawn by individual landowners following approval of their proposed projects.

These surplus funds will be carried forward and are available for new grants in 2026. As detailed further below and in Document 1, recommendations to improve promotion and communications and to increase the grant amounts and rates for underutilized project types are intended to create more demand for the program and to drive increased uptake of available funding. As well, a motion from Councillor Brown in June 2024 provided direction to allocate some surplus funding for the living snow fence pilot, including the three sites planned for Spring 2026. If the recommendations from this report are approved and implemented, Program staff anticipate that the ORCWP will benefit from stronger landowner participation and increased overall uptake for 2026-2030.

Governance

The ORCWP is guided by an external Program Committee composed of representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations, provincial agencies, local Conservation Authorities, and community members-at-large. The Program Committee typically meets annually and provides guidance on program design and delivery. Members also serve as ambassadors of the Program, assist with promotion and outreach, and identify opportunities to meet the Program goals.

During the 2021-2025 period, a variety of external factors led to difficulties with establishing and maintaining the Program Committee. Challenges were experienced in terms of restrictions on in-person gatherings coinciding the launch of the new Program Committee and with engaging members to share constructive feedback on staff reports with meetings being held annually. Program staff experienced obstacles in recruiting representatives from agricultural organizations, and this could reflect the membership challenges that agricultural and other external groups are experiencing more broadly.

While the governance structure has worked well in the past, it has become apparent that the Program Committee is no longer functioning the way it was intended. Interest holders stressed the value in maintaining engagement with diverse organizations, and they proposed some alternatives to facilitate discussions and solicit feedback on program design and delivery from external groups with relevant expertise. The suggested alternatives range from forming an advisory panel to connect with relevant external groups to working with existing committees to seek feedback on specific items rather than establishing a formal panel or committee. Further details are available in Document 1.

Monitoring and Reporting

The current framework for monitoring and evaluating the Program is comprehensive and uses a variety of metrics. The opportunity for grant recipients to complete a feedback survey immediately following project completion was introduced following the last review in 2021 and provides valuable insights on the overall Program.

Program representatives attend follow-up visits for a select number of completed projects to ensure projects are maintained and to examine benefits. Project statistics are tracked by the Program database which contains project data going back 25 years. The Program database continues to house valuable information, and interest holders expressed concerns with continuing to use Microsoft Access and suggested transitioning to a more modern platform.

The Program reports annually to the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. Program Reviews are undertaken on a five-year cycle to examine strengths and challenges, ensure the Program remains relevant, and provide recommendations for the future Program and possible modifications.

Key Program Changes Recommended for 2026-2030

The following are key changes recommended for the Program Review and are based on feedback provided by interest holders and grant recipients and a scan of similar programs across Ontario. These changes align with the current program goals and objectives and are unrelated to the proposed program expansion. The complete list and details are contained within Document 1.

Eligible Project Types

1. Modify the eligibility criteria, grant amounts, and/or grant rates for the following project types:
 - a. Septic system repair/replacement (expand eligibility, increase grant amount, remove funding cap)
 - b. Land retirement incentive (introduce flexibility for amount per acre and maximum acreage, and increase number of years from 3 to 5)
 - c. Natural windbreaks and watercourse buffers (combine guidelines, align the grant amounts and rates)
 - d. Nutrient management plan/precision farming (update guidelines, increase

grant amount)

- e. Watercourse fencing (update guidelines, increase grant amount and rate)
 - f. Wetland restoration (increase grant amount)
 - g. Cover crops (adjust incentive payment and increase grant amount)
 - h. Tile drain control structures (increase grant amount and rate)
2. Introduce living snow fencing as a new eligible project type. Set maximum grant amount at \$15,000, with a grant rate of 100%, and include a land retirement incentive payment of \$700 per acre per year for a minimum of 10 years.

Program Administration

3. Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Program in the following ways:
- a. Update the funding pre-requisites to include the 4th or 5th Edition Environmental Farm Plan for farm projects.
 - b. Increase the funding limit from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per property between 2026-2030 to offer more flexibility to landowners.

Promotion and Outreach

4. Explore new methods to engage landowners and community groups to increase awareness and encourage uptake of the Program in the following ways:
- a. Shift funding to larger signage and install in highly visible locations.
 - b. Focus communications and messaging on higher impact project types and rotate feature projects as part of promotional campaigns.
 - c. Work with community partners to promote the educational initiatives project type.
5. Increase targeted advertising using social media and other non-conventional media platforms; develop and release at least one new product annually.
6. Host local forums or events to showcase farms or project locations in partnership with agricultural societies, landowner associations, and property owners; host at least one event annually.

Program Budget

7. Continue to fund the Program at \$200,000 per year for 2026-2030 through a special levy to South Nation Conservation.

Program Committee

8. Replace the formal Program Committee governance structure with a more informal, flexible approach to solicit feedback on program design and delivery from existing committees and external organizations with relevant expertise.

Monitoring and Reporting

9. Explore alternatives to Microsoft Access for managing the Program database.

Recommendations for Program Expansion in 2027

The following recommendations stem from interest holder input and a scan of similar programs across Ontario. These recommendations are aimed at exploring and developing the expansion of the Program's scope and are subject to additional study and consultations prior to seeking Committee and Council's approval of a preferred approach.

1. Expand the Program's goal and objectives beyond water quality improvements to capture environmental sustainability initiatives and build climate preparedness. Consider ways to foster increased environmental stewardship and support climate change adaptation and resilience efforts in rural Ottawa.
2. Undertake a comprehensive study to ensure that proposed new project types represent best management practices and will make positive contributions towards improving environmental sustainability and climate preparedness in rural Ottawa. Include consultations with internal and external interest holders, including residents. Where feasible, explore options for integrating climate adaptation measures for rural Ottawa residents within other existing City programs.
3. Based on the results of the above recommendations, develop an enhanced suite of projects, including eligibility criteria, maximum grant amounts, and grant rates, to expand the Program's scope. Consider project types in the following general categories: natural habitat improvements, protection for species at risk habitats,

nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff and protect against flooding, agricultural adaptations, and extreme weather preparedness.

4. Bring a report for the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Council in 2027 with recommendations that may include an expanded Program scope and enhanced suite of projects. Include a rationale and recommendations for any increased funding needed to support the expansion of the Program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report. The proposed annual special levy of \$200,000 to the South Nation Conservation Authority is consistent with the annual levy for the 2021–2025 program and with its 2026 levy request. Any additional pressures identified during the proposed expansion of the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program will be brought forward to Council for consideration and approval and, if required, incorporated into the 2027 budget process.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to adopting the recommendations in this report.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

This is a City-wide report.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS

There were no advisory committee consultations undertaken in association with this report recommendation.

CONSULTATION

Key interest holders for the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program, including Conservation Authority partners, Program Committee members, Review Committee members, and City of Ottawa staff, were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2021-2025 Program. Interest holders were invited to complete a questionnaire, either as part of a verbal interview or using an online form, to share insights and experiences with the Program. Seven respondents participated in a verbal interview, and another seven provided feedback using the online questionnaire.

Program participants were invited to share their feedback through an online survey following project completion and grant payment. Conservation Authority staff sent email

notifications to grant recipients with a link to the survey. Participants shared their experiences with the Program, their reasons for completing projects, and the benefits that they observed. They were also encouraged to suggest improvements in how the Program is delivered, administered and promoted. Seventy-five participants completed the survey (a 28 per cent response rate).

Further details on the consultations undertaken as part of this review are available in Document 1.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program follows all requirements in accordance with the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*.

The proposed changes and new initiatives meet all legislative requirements and are designed to reduce administrative barriers for landowners, including persons with disabilities and older adults. Outreach materials, application processes and guidelines are available in accessible formats and with communication supports, upon request.

Additionally, all online platforms and digital content will meet all requirements under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), level 2.0 AA.

While consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee was not required as the changes do not alter current service delivery, staff will consult with the Corporate Accessibility Office, as required, to ensure any new actions and initiatives as part of this program incorporate accessibility standards and best practices to the highest degree possible.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no asset management implications for this report.

CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

Several project types currently available to landowners under the existing Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program (ORCWP) offer environmental benefits from the perspective of climate change adaptation and resilience. For example, the installation of control structures at tile drain outlets controls flow from the tiles during the growing season and can help retain water on the landscape during low water conditions. As well, the creation or restoration of wetlands can provide water storage, reduce flooding, and

replenish groundwater supplies. Projects related to natural windbreaks, watercourse buffers and forest management plans contribute to improved tree canopy cover and the growth of sustainable forests, actions that are linked to improved climate resiliency.

The 5-year review of the ORCWP highlighted an opportunity to broaden the Program's scope beyond water quality improvements to include a climate change lens. This report includes recommendations to undertake additional study and consultation with the aim of expanding the Program's scope to support climate change resilience and/or climate adaptation efforts in rural Ottawa. Project categories and best management practices to be examined more closely include nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff (e.g., rain gardens, bioswales and bioretention ponds) and protect against flooding, agricultural adaptations (e.g., technologies and practices for soil, water and nutrient conservation, runoff management, use of drought-sensitive crops, and stormwater irrigation ponds), and extreme weather preparedness (e.g., preparing properties for flooding, wildland fires, drought, large storm events, power outages, and livestock evacuation).

This report recognizes that supporting initiatives to adapt to changing climate conditions would require collaboration across several City departments. Any expansions to the ORCWP would need to complement existing climate-related programs and may involve a review of existing City programs to identify gaps and unique risks for rural residents. An expanded ORCWP scope would also need to align with Council-approved strategies such as Climate Ready Ottawa, the Climate Change Master Plan, the Infrastructure Master Plan, and the Stormwater Retrofit Program.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no delegation of authority implications associated with this report.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

There are no economic implications associated with this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program protects and improves the quality of surface water and groundwater by working with rural landowners to implement projects on their properties. Projects include agricultural best management practices and environmental stewardship. With 88 per cent of watercourses flowing through private property in the City's rural areas, working with landowners is an effective means of protecting and improving water quality.

The Program contributes to Provincial policy including the Great Lakes Strategy, Nutrient Management Act, and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. It supports the City's ability to comply with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement and further supports the City's Climate Change Master Plan (2020).

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no Indigenous, gender, and equity implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program supports farmers and other rural landowners to undertake projects on their land that protect water quality. Since 2000, the Program has supported over 1,600 projects with more than \$3.3 million in grants. The proposed renewed Program continues to support the rural community as well as farmers within the urban boundary.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program supports the strategic priority for the 2023-2026 Term of Council of building "a city that is green and resilient".

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program 2021-2025 Review and Renewal

Document 2 – Annexes to the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program 2021-2025 Review and Renewal

DISPOSITION

Strategic Initiatives Department staff will work with South Nation, Rideau Valley, and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities to renew the 2026-2030 Program, upon Council's approval of the report. Strategic Initiatives Department staff will also collaborate with internal and external interest holders to undertake the additional studies and consultations necessary to develop options for an expanded Program and will

report back to Council with recommendations in 2027.