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Farmers find a friend for Dundas Valley

Conservation authority to reveal 50-year vision

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Dundas-area farmers could have a new best friend in the Hamilton Conservation Authority, better known for flood control, recreation and protection of natural lands.

Its 50-year vision for the Dundas Valley, to be presented to the public Thursday night, says care must be taken to ensure urban growth does not destroy ecologically important natural systems, the agricultural economy or the rural lifestyle.

It stresses the need to keep farmers farming.

Steve Miazga, the conservation authority's chief administrative officer, said the Eat Local movement and the idea of supporting local growers could help sustain farming in the valley as an important piece of Hamilton's agricultural economy.

Sally Leppard of Lura Consulting, who guided the drafting of the vision, says it takes a novel approach in looking at "natural resources of the valley area as the basis for a vibrant economy and a healthy community."

York University researchers forecast a billion-dollar payback from restoring Hamilton Harbour, and Leppard says preserving and enhancing the valley could similarly boost the economy by increasing agricultural tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism.

The conservation authority owns 27 per cent of the valley, 1,460 hectares.

The 56-page vision document calls for protecting more by buying it, encouraging owners to donate it to public agencies, obtaining conservation easements to preserve natural features, regulating land use and simply convincing owners to be good stewards of their land.

The call to secure more of the valley coincides with the conservation authority's hiring a consultant to draft a land-procurement strategy for the whole Hamilton Harbour watershed.

A report next fall is expected to recommend where to focus efforts.

Miazga concedes the vision contains a lot of general, feel-good goals -- "That's what a 50-year plan is" -- and says the next step is to develop an implementation plan and timetable, in partnership with organizations such as the Hamilton Naturalists' Club, the Bruce Trail Conservancy and the Royal Botanical Gardens, which has produced a draft Cootes to Escarpment land-management strategy that includes part of Dundas Valley.

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