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BACKGROUND

What is the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation?

The Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation (the FFCC or Corporation) is a not for profit, volunteer-governed social enterprise.

Our mission is to provide policy and direction to the Ferguson Tree Nursery and to use the profits thereof to promote the awareness of and interest in forestry (in particular afforestation and sustainable forest management). In addition, the mission is to maintain, enhance and promote the responsible use and stewardship of recreational and conservation lands managed by the Corporation for the benefit of the residents of the Municipality of North Grenville and surrounding area.

The Corporation operates and has accountability for these lands; but does not own the property.

What is the Ferguson Tree Nursery?

The Ferguson Tree Nursery (FTN, or the Nursery) is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation. The Nursery operates on 120 hectares (300 acres) of land formerly used by the Provincial G. Howard Ferguson Forest Station and leased from Municipality of North Grenville. Created as a tree nursery in 1945, the Nursery was operated by the Government of Ontario until 1995, when it was shut down.

By 1997, through efforts of many local volunteers, organizations and townships, the Nursery was saved, and has operated as a non-profit corporation since 2000 on leased municipal lands.

The Nursery is Eastern Ontario's the largest supplier of high-quality tree seedlings and nursery stock, growing approximately 2,000,000 native and non-invasive naturalized trees and woody shrubs annually, produced from local seed sources.

The Ferguson Tree Nursery provides year-round employment for local residents as well as additional seasonal employment (18 employees and 5-7 temporary workers). The Nursery sells bulk stock to partners such as conservation authorities, as well as to landowners, and operates an outlet store for purchasing in smaller quantities. Over the past few years, the Nursery has strengthened their business focused management approach, including diversification of product lines to increase sales while enhancing resilience in the evolving economic landscape.

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What is the Ferguson Forest Centre?

The Ferguson Forest Centre is the name used to encompass the entirety of the area on which the Ferguson Tree Nursery operates, as well as the area for which the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation has responsibility to operate and maintain in partnership with various organizations.

The land on which the Centre is located includes land owned by the Municipality of North Grenville as well as Crown land, that is, land owned by the government for which the Corporation has authorization to provide oversight and management in accordance with Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry requirements.

The total area of the Centre is approximately 445 hectares (1100 acres) and includes 22 kilometres of marked, public trails; a dog park; an arboretum; a toboggan hill; a kayak/canoe launch; picnic shelter and park; an 18-hole disc-golf course; the North Grenville Giving Garden; a winter trail; and nursery greenhouses, fields, and infrastructure.

THE REQUEST AND LAND DETAILS

What is the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation requesting?

The Corporation is requesting that the Municipality of North Grenville sell a specific, limited parcel of land with limited productivity that is not optimal for the Nursery's agricultural purposes, and that monies from the sale be invested into the Nursery, and by extension, into the Centre over time.

Details about the investment approach and associated accountability for how it is used, are contained in the additional questions and answers.

Where is the land to be sold located, and how much area does it cover?

The parcel of land is 5.3 hectares (13 acres) of vacant land that is owned by the Municipality of North Grenville. The land is currently leased by the Corporation for Nursery use, fronting the northern side of County Road 43 between St. Michael's Catholic High School and Anniversary Road. This parcel of land is non-prime agricultural land.



Subject land fronts County Road 43 between St. Michael School and Anniversary Way are denoted in red

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How will the recreational areas and community activities be affected?

None of the current community groups, activities or recreational opportunities will be impacted by our proposal, as we envision it. All current activities and spaces used by the public will remain untouched as a result of this proposal. In addition, no significant existing tree cover should be impacted by this proposal, other than windbreak tree lines.

Why is the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation requesting the sale of this specific parcel of land?

The proposed 5.3-hectare (13 acre) parcel of land is comprised of low-quality soils, specifically Classes 4 and 5, which are non-prime agricultural soil categories¹ as per the Canada Land Inventory.

The Nursery has sufficient, higher quality locations better suited for utilization which will yield better growing results. To make this parcel of land viable to produce the quantity and quality of seedlings needed for commercial products, it has previously required, and would continue to require, significant investment.

The subject lands are located within the existing defined urban boundary and urban service area, which would maximize return on the area's existing public investment in the road, water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure. Located on the main thoroughfare and being highly visible, this parcel of land would generate the highest monetary return if approved and assessed for mixed commercial/residential use.

Is the land potentially subject to the sale a result of the improvements to and widening of County Road 43 by the United County of Leeds and Grenville?

While a narrow strip of the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation's leased lands along County Road 43 will be removed and incorporated into the road improvements and widening, this road work is not a contributing reason for the Corporation's proposal.

The reasons for the requested sale of these lands are detailed in other questions and answers.

¹ As per the Canada Land Inventory agricultural soils survey, <https://sis.agr.gc.ca/cansis/nsdb/cli/index.html>

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How did the Municipality of North Grenville acquire the subject land?

Just prior to amalgamation, the Township of Oxford on Rideau purchased the 120 hectare (300 acre) Provincial tree nursery (the G. Howard Ferguson Forest Station) for approximately \$500,000. The Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation and Ferguson Tree Nursery have repaid that purchase price and more through the years, in accordance with a lease agreement with the Municipality of North Grenville.

FUNDING AND ASSURANCES

Why should the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation and Ferguson Tree Nursery get the money from the land sale?

The Corporation has successfully provided the community with land stewardship, conservation, and recreational development for more than 20 years. Through lease agreements with the Municipality of North Grenville, the cost of that initial investment has been more than repaid.

Now, more than ever, the Nursery serves a critical function in afforestation and reforestation but needs to expand and modernize its operations. As the Centre has developed under the Corporation's stewardship, thousands more regular visitors now make use of the Centre, making this green space a unique natural feature directly adjacent to an urban area. Investing the land sale money into the Corporation ensures a long term sustainable growing operation which in turn, will fund the ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the recreational and conservation-focused green space.

This proposal arises from a long-term plan and vision to ensure the future sustainability of the Nursery and Centre, protecting a valuable community asset. Much like what was necessary in 1996 when the Government of Ontario ceased to operate the Nursery and maintain the Centre, action is required to secure its future.

Why does the Corporation need the money from the land sale now?

Traditionally, the Ferguson Tree Nursery operated as a small farm. Like many small farm operations, to stay effective and competitive in the current business environment, the Nursery, and by extension the Corporation, now needs to accelerate their transition to operate in a different way – more efficiently, more effectively, and in a more modern way – to remain a viable, sustainable organization in this community.

Nursery sales have decreased over the past 3-5 years as a result of program and funding changes at the Provincial level, while operating costs have increased.

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In addition, the difficulty in hiring skilled workers necessitates that investment in new technologies is required to allow current staff to operate more effectively. Equipment needs to be upgraded; labour and other costs continue to rise; and to remain competitive with other nurseries and to fulfill the major sales opportunities that come with environmental program capital that has become available, timely upgrades and investment is critical. We must be able to invest in “Smart Farm” technologies to remain viable.

The current Nursery leadership, under the oversight and direction of the Corporation, have made numerous positive changes to how the Nursery operates and how the Centre is managed with the resources currently available.

Ultimately, this is an investment to remain relevant and viable through the sale of lands that does not diminish our ability to grow trees, while enhancing the potential for increased community benefits

Rather than selling the land, why not go to traditional financial institutions for financing?

Currently the cost of borrowing remains high. Even with low interest rates, as a non-profit community social enterprise that does not own land assets, and with existing equipment, buildings and infrastructure that are aging and require upgrading, financial institutions are reluctant to provide financing. Potential private sector partnerships as well as senior government grant and funding programs have previously been explored. No feasible opportunities that would meet the needs and mandate of the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation / Tree Nursery were identified through those avenues.

Why not undertake fundraising to raise the money needed?

A number of the capital investments required have or are becoming urgent to address in the near term. In addition, the amount of money required for some of these investments is significant and cannot reasonably be achieved in the time frame required through fundraising. Examples of the type of investment required can be seen in [Appendix A](#).

What will the monies from the land sale be used for?

Much of the equipment and all the infrastructure in operation today, was purchased and implemented in the last century when the Provincial government operated the nursery. The monies will be used to increase operational capacity and to modernize infrastructure.

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This investment will enhance the Ferguson Tree Nursery's competitiveness through improved product quality, making this the nursery of choice for large customers; and through increased production and sales, thereby ensuring sustainability into the future. The Corporation has undertaken capital planning to identify areas that need investment, and the timing of that investment.

This includes updating buildings, equipment, and infrastructure. In addition, a solution to address the unacceptable levels of sodium in the groundwater, which compromises the quality and survivability of seedlings, is required. For specific examples of what would be addressed through the capital plan, please see [Appendix A](#) in this document.

Funds available beyond the Nursery's capital needs will be utilized to enhance the public spaces within the Centre for enjoyment of the community.

These spaces and activities include walking, cross country skiing and horseback riding trails; a dog park; arboretum development; tobogganing; disc golfing; and park areas within the Ferguson Forest Centre. Creation of new spaces to meet community needs are under discussion, and may include an Indigenous cultural area, along with other potential new educational and recreational opportunities. The Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation has demonstrated to the community that it is an organization that will steadfastly work for the benefit of the community.

What happens if the land sale does not proceed, and no monies are made available to the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation and Ferguson Tree Nursery?

The Corporation and Nursery will continue to operate to the best of their ability. Efforts to modernize and make operations more efficient and effective have been made with the resources available; however, without investment, these organizations will be compelled to operate in a diminished and increasingly precarious capacity in the short term. In the longer term, it may mean ceasing operations.

A lack of investment will limit the ability to grow, adapt to and mitigate impacts from an evolving and changing marketplace. Opportunities to significantly increase sales revenue exist, however the Nursery's ability to compete for this business will remain limited. If the Nursery's revenue is limited, the amount of investment into community recreational spaces will also remain limited.

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Enhancements that have been requested by the community and which the Corporation would like to make will not likely occur, at a time when investment in green space and outdoor recreation are increasingly expected and while the community is experiencing significant growth.

How will the Municipality of North Grenville and the public have assurance the funds from the sale have been used for the requested purposes?

The Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation will commit to annually reporting and detailing to the Municipality of North Grenville how the funds have been used towards the intended purposes.

With a member of municipal council holding a voting seat on the Board of Directors, a Councillor attends regular meetings of the Board throughout the year where detailed financial and operational information is reviewed. In addition, the lease agreement, allows the Municipality of North Grenville access to audited financial statements.

The Corporation has a demonstrated history of a productive, mutually beneficial relationship with the Municipality and partner organizations in the community, which will continue to be the foundation of our relationship.

The forecast capital investments for the Ferguson Tree Nursery will be less than the estimated revenue from the land sale, providing ample funds to address current and future enhancements of the recreational and conservation areas within the Ferguson Forest Centre.

What will prevent the Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation from requesting the sale of more land in the future?

The intent of this specific sale of a limited parcel of land is to allow the Ferguson Tree Nursery to re-capitalize operations, thereby moving into a more competitive position that will be sustainable into the future. The Nursery has been diversifying product offerings to expand in different markets, thereby gradually reducing the Nursery's reliance on government tree planting programs. This investment will support these efforts into the future, building a more resilient, self-sustaining organization. Therefore, no further land sells would be warranted. Any request for the sale of land in the future would have to be approved by the Municipality of North Grenville; would have to be supported by a sufficient case to warrant such a sale; and would need to be demonstrably of the benefit of the community.

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This current request is based on research, costing analysis, and forecasting of what will be required to place the Nursery, and the Corporation, into that position of sustainability. It is expected to meet current and projected needs with planned growth in a measured, reasonable way.

Opportunities for the Nursery currently include Federal funding, with a contract secured to 2031; client feedback that this is the nursery of choice if quality can be maintained; and increasing social desire and pressure for reforestation/afforestation and community green spaces is aligned with the Corporation's mission.

The subject lands of this proposal are non-prime agricultural lands, which means that they present a specific opportunity that will not impact the Nursery operations, while enabling community development needs to be considered in a cost-effective way, given that the lands are within the urban boundary and service area.

FUTURE USE OF THE LAND

What would be the future use of the lands to be sold?

The Municipality of North Grenville will determine the use of the site through future official plan and zoning by-law amendments.

This could include potential mixed commercial and residential uses, aligning with the Municipality's goals of improving housing availability and affordability in locations that are accessible through active transportation.

This parcel of land presents opportunities in the areas of affordable, geared to income housing; accessible housing in rental units; connection to other areas of the community and to businesses previously only safely accessible by car; and more. With careful planning and consideration, several community needs can be addressed with appropriate development.

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What is the environmental impact of selling this land, and not using it for tree nursery purposes?

This land currently contains limited seedling stock planted by the nursery which requires supplementation to successfully grow, and which is removed as the stock is ready to sell.

Mature tree lines at the edges of fields were planted as windbreaks to protect seedling stock. The Ferguson Tree Nursery will continue planting trees in other areas of the Centre, as part of ongoing enhancements. This request is part of a longer-term vision for a sustainable, successful Nursery operation, which will ultimately benefit the community through enhancement of those existing green spaces. This can best be achieved by ensuring the success of the Nursery.

The Municipality of North Grenville is bound to observe all required environmental requirements in the sale and development of the land through the applicable by-laws, acts, and regulations.

APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF CAPITAL INVESTMENT REQUIREMENTS

Much of the equipment and all the infrastructure in operation today, was purchased and implemented in the last century when the Provincial government operated the nursery.

As a result, examples of capital investments required for long-term success include:

- Engineering solutions to the unacceptable levels of sodium in the well water, which currently inhibits seedling growth and compromises quality.
- Upgrades and repairs of greenhouses (new air compressors, new computer boards for water walkers, new AC fans, replace lower walls greenhouses, new greenhouse controllers, upgrading corrugated plastic).
- Engineering solution acceptable to the Ministry of Labour for gutter connect greenhouse roof accessibility.
- Generators for east greenhouses and seed freezers to ensure protection of stock during power outages.
- New equipment for seed processing (fanning mill, kiln/cone conditioning room) and field operations (laser weeder, fertilizer drop spreader, six row furrow machine).