



Essex Region
Conservation Foundation
enriching the place for life

2020
Gratitude
Report

Thank you.

A Message from the President & the Executive Director

There's no question that 2020 has been a year of uncertainty, challenge and change, not just for the Essex Region Conservation Foundation, but around the globe. But what we have all discovered through these difficult times is our collective capacity for resilience. We also realized that while there is much we can live without, our need for nature is paramount. Over this past year, more people than ever experienced the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of nature at conservation areas and along the greenway trails – trails that were created thanks to the support from donors like you.

We also witnessed first-hand the strength of the Windsor-Essex community in coming together in times of need. From the community uniting in support of healthcare heroes, to the June 27th Miracle Food Drive, to the incredible support of local tree planting, trail creation, and the new John R. Park Homestead Heritage Centre, there's no question as to the generosity and commitment of those who make this place our home – for life.

As we write this report of gratitude, we reflect upon a year that has challenged us all in unprecedented ways, and which has seen so many rise to overcome incredible obstacles. While COVID-19 required the cancellation of two of our main fundraising events, new supporters rallied around the Virtual Bike Tour. We witnessed an astounding number of gifts to support the new Heritage Centre on Giving Tuesday, and are so grateful for surprise donations made in support of the trails and conservation areas that have benefited so many.

Thank you for the impact you are making in making the Windsor-Essex region more sustainable and resilient, and ensuring it continues to be our collective Place for Life.

Thank you for making a difference.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Stockwell Andrews".

Susan Stockwell Andrews
President



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Byrne".

Tim Byrne
Executive Director

Our Mission

Improving our environment to enrich our lives.

Our Vision

The Essex Region is a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place with healthy and thriving watersheds, Great Lakes, and a green culture.

Our Goals

Connecting Communities by Trails; Greening our Region; Inspiring Future Generations through Outdoor Education; Preserving our Heritage; Building and maintaining a responsible, sustainable and ethical ERCF.



Connecting Communities

Holiday Beach Cycling Trail & Wetland

Thanks to a generous contribution of \$26,000 from the Amherstburg Community Foundation, the first phase of the Holiday Beach Cycling Trail can begin. The one-acre wetland is being constructed as Phase One of a single track cycling project for which funds are still being raised. Ultimately, the excavated fill from the wetland will be used to create topographical interest for the new cycling trail. The new trail will traverse around the new and existing wetlands, through the Essex County Demonstration Farm, and connect with trails already created within the Conservation Area. Interest in cycling trails continues to grow with the expansion of Greenways and the County Wide Active Transportation System.

“Wetlands are increasingly important when it comes to managing the impacts of extreme rainfall events, mitigating the impacts of flooding and taking action against climate change. We are extremely thankful to the Amherstburg Community Foundation and all of its donors for their leadership in supporting this exciting project that benefits the environment, and encourages healthy and active lifestyles.”

~ Claire Wales, Vice-President, Essex Region Conservation Foundation



20 Years of Greenways

2020 marked twenty years of building and expanding the region's trail network.

The trail that is now the Chrysler Canada Greenway was acquired by the Essex Region Conservation Foundation from Chesapeake & Ohio Seaboard Coast Line (CSX) in the mid-90s. Thanks to the support of many donors, it was opened as a 48km trail stretching from Oldcastle to Harrow, and then ultimately to Ruthven, as part of the millennium celebrations in the year 2000. Walkers, runners, cyclists – even a penny-farthing – joined the celebrations. Over time, this has become a community treasure and real-estate selling point.

In 2002, thanks to the success of the original greenway, CN donated an additional 26km of abandoned rail line which was transformed into the Cypher Systems Group Greenway in 2017. It intersects with the existing Chrysler Canada Greenway in McGregor, connecting the urban centre of Essex with the Town of Amherstburg.

Later that fall, the Rotary (1918) Centennial Hub was opened thanks to a lead donation from the Rotary Club of Windsor (1918) and contributions and collaborations with many partners. This 3 kilometre stretch was unique in that it was created from scratch, rather than converted from an existing rail line.

This critical piece of the trail connected the Chrysler Canada Greenway to the Rt. Honourable Herb Gray Parkway Trails, the Town of LaSalle Trails, and the Town of Tecumseh Trails, bringing the community vision of a region connected by trail to fruition, and a key element of what makes the Windsor-Essex region the Place for Life.



“Over these past two decades, there has been a growing use of this region-wide trail system. Businesses have thrived as a result of their proximity to the Greenway. New bike shops have opened. Tourism adventures such as wine-trail rides continue to grow in popularity. It truly goes to show that with imagination and the support of many, anything is possible.”

~ Tim Byrne, Executive Director, Essex Region Conservation Foundation





Greening Our Region

WindsorEats - Partners in Sustainability

In February, award-winning tourism innovator WindsorEats announced its commitment to initiatives that promote environmental, social and economic sustainability within the local tourism industry and became the first Partner in Sustainability. Prior to the impacts of COVID-19, WindsorEats committed 2% of their ticket and event sales to be invested in community tree planting efforts.

Partners in Sustainability is a flexible model whereby businesses can support tree planting efforts in a way that works within their business operations. Trees are identified as the single biggest weapon in the fight against climate change. In the Windsor-Essex region, only 8.5% of the landscape consists of natural areas coverage, and millions of trees must be planted across the region to create a future of environmental sustainability.

In addition to providing opportunities for organizations to support local tree planting, the Partners in Sustainability initiative also provides a way for individuals to support local tree planting while reducing their carbon footprint for driving, flying and energy consumption. Watch for the expansion of this model to provide enhanced opportunities for businesses to contribute to regional sustainability in a variety of ways.



“We are so delighted to welcome WindsorEats as our first Partner In Sustainability, and hope that many other local businesses – big and small – will also want to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility by supporting this initiative.”

~ Susan Stockwell Andrews, President, ERCF



Rotary Legacy Forest

In November, 75 Rotarians from across Windsor-Essex came together for a safety-compliant planting of the second phase of the Rotary Legacy Forest. Thanks to donations from 12 Rotary Clubs in the Windsor-Essex community, more than 50,000 trees will be planted and 70 acres of farmland will be restored. The Rotary Legacy Forest is located in the Cedar Creek watershed, and will enhance habitat and improve water quality. As trees are identified as the biggest weapon in the fight against climate change, these Rotarians are also taking climate action. Rotarians are truly making a difference!



Reid Funeral Home LTD.

Reid Funeral Home Ltd. celebrated its 25th year contributing to the Fred Cada Heritage Forest at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area. While COVID-19 prohibited the tribute service from taking place, trees continued to be planted in honour of those who had passed away. Thank you, Reid Funeral Home Ltd., for a quarter century of improving the environment while honouring the memories and families whom you have served.





Inspiring Future Generations

University of Windsor Alumni Association Outdoor Classroom

The University of Windsor Alumni Association Outdoor Classroom was opened on September 30 to dedicate this innovative learning space as part of the University's Alumni Week celebrations.

"We are happy to play a role in creating this important outdoor space especially during a time when students of all ages are learning in unprecedented and unique ways," said Beth-Ann Prince, University of Windsor Alumni Association board president. "Educational spaces like this one will benefit current and future University of Windsor alumni, their families and the community."

The Alumni Association donated \$50,000 in 2019 toward the outdoor classroom and research at Lebo Creek Wetland.

The importance of outdoor learning spaces and providing opportunities for young people to connect with nature cannot be overstated.

In addition to providing enhanced learning experiences for the young people who participate in field trips to Holiday Beach, the Outdoor Classroom will be used for other educational workshops such as migration talks, banding demonstrations, and owl prowls. Student researchers from the University's Ornithology Department, who regularly conduct field work at the site, will also utilize this educational space.



"Outdoor education is a building block for the success of future generations. A compelling body of evidence clearly shows that introducing kids to nature has numerous health benefits, including increased physical activity, healthier body weight, better concentration, reduced symptoms of ADHD and anxiety, and improved energy. As well, time spent in nature during childhood is one of the biggest factors that contribute to environmental stewardship in adulthood. This new educational facility will connect more students to nature, and help foster an interest in science and technology, thanks to the University of Windsor Alumni Association."

~ Claire Wales, Vice President, Essex Region Conservation Foundation



Preserving Our Heritage

Creating a Heritage Hub

On February 14, 2020, the Homestead Heritage Hub Fundraising Campaign was launched to match the Government of Canada's \$600,000 grant through the Canadian Experiences Fund.

Thanks to the lead donation from the Stephanie & Barry Zekelman Foundation, a \$100,000 pledge from the Town of Essex, and incredibly generous contributions from many supporters like you, nearly \$500,000 was committed through the 2020 year!



The new Heritage Centre will provide much needed climate-controlled classroom space and accessible washroom facilities. The new Heritage Centre will allow us to enhance historical education and interpretation, better engage students in outdoor education, and provide appropriate space for traveling exhibits. It will also serve as a tourism hub for the Town of Essex, and will enable an accessible and equitable learning experience for all students, visitors and guests.

Construction began in August, and the grand opening of the Heritage Centre is anticipated for spring 2021, thanks to the many supporters who have contributed.



Giving Tuesday & Giving Tuesday Now

GivingTuesday is a global movement for giving and volunteering, taking place each year after Black Friday. The “Opening day of the giving season,” it’s a time when charities, companies and individuals join together and rally for favourite causes. In the same way that retailers take part in Black Friday, the giving community comes together for GivingTuesday. Across Canada and around the world, GivingTuesday unites communities by sharing our capacity to care for and empower one another.

This year, Canada Helps created Giving Tuesday Now on May 5, to invite support of charities impacted by COVID-19. Thanks to supporters like you, more than \$6,500 was raised for the John R. Park Homestead Heritage Centre.

Then, on December 1, with a matching donation from Architecttura AE, nearly \$13,725 was raised to support the Heritage Hub at the John R. Park Homestead - the largest number of gifts that have ever been received from individual donors by the Foundation in one day! Thank you, everyone, for your support!



#GIVINGTUESDAY™



Thank You – Virtual Bike Tour Supporters!

While gathering restrictions required the cancellation of the Golf Tournament and Santa Run, trail supporters rallied to participate in the Virtual Bike Tour. For 10 days in September, participants ‘chose their own adventure’ and cycled in support of regional trails! In total, \$12,646 was raised! Such a big ‘thank you’ to the cyclists, to Enbridge and all sponsors and donors, and to the Celebrity Cyclists who highlighted their favourite trail routes across the region!



“Thank you for all the wonderful conservation area walking trails that have been a great source of stress relief and enjoyment during this Covid 19 lockdown.”
~ Trail user email



“Thank you for providing the green space and trails that have been instrumental in maintaining a positive mental state for myself and many of my friends throughout this Covid crisis. We are very grateful to have such beautiful places to spend time - walking and biking and breathing fresh air.”
~ Trail user email

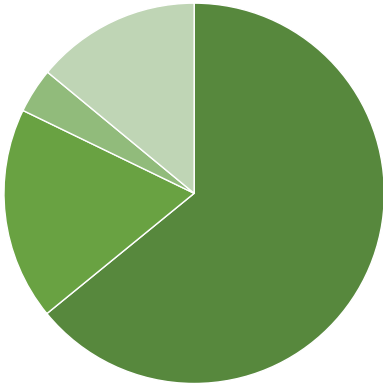


2020 Financial Highlights

“Despite the challenges that the world-wide Covid-19 pandemic presented locally, the 2020 financial goals of the Foundation were virtually achieved, primarily due to larger-than-expected unrealized investment gains, that offset the shortfall in special event revenues. Fund balances of \$372,626 at year end are slightly higher than budgeted and the Foundation realized 93% of its target for project grants. Additional unbudgeted donations were received, due to a shift in focus to major gifts from fundraising events, and this was possible not only due to keen interest and public support of compelling and high visibility projects, but also due to consistent and persistent efforts of Board Members, supporters and ERCA staff.”

~ Shelley McMullen, Treasurer

Revenues By Source: \$331,260 Budgeted Revenues - \$379,800



Donations from companies & individuals (non-event)	\$212,336 / 64.1%
Donations & grants from charities & foundations	\$59,871 / 18.1%
Fundraising including event donations & sponsorships	\$12,645 / 3.8%
Interest and unrealized investment gains	\$46,408 / 14.0%

While donation and grant revenues were \$53,000 less than budgeted, \$50,000 is expected to be received in 2021. A budgeted donation in the amount of \$25,000 was remitted directly to ERCA, however, that shortfall for the Foundation was largely offset by significant additional individual and corporate donations for the Heritage Centre, the Holiday Beach Cycling Trail and the Cypher Systems Group Greenway Entrance. As fundraising events were cancelled during the year, there was a shortfall in gross event revenues, however it was offset by unrealized investment gains, which exceeded \$37,000.

Grants By Priority: \$667,146 Budgeted Grants - \$716,339

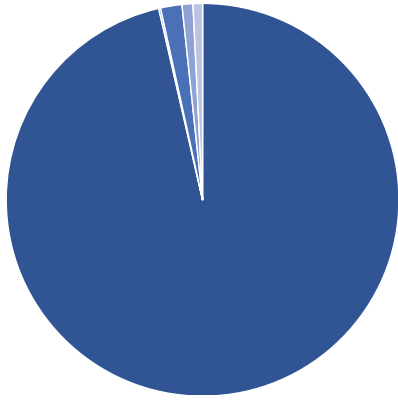


Preserving	\$306,411 / 45.9%
Connecting	\$158,460 / 23.8%
Greening	\$60,795 / 9.1%
Inspiring	\$111,480 / 16.7%
Shared priorities / sustainability	\$30,000 / 4.5%

2020 Financial Highlights

Grants & Operating Expenses: \$691,979

Budgeted Grants & Operating Expenses - \$755,404



Grants to Essex Region Conservation Authority	\$667,146 / 96.4%
Fundraising supplies	\$1,054 / 0.2%
Consulting	\$12,183 / 1.8%
Other operating supplies & expenses	\$6,196 / 0.9%
Audit & insurance	\$5,400 / 0.8%

The Foundation utilized a mere 8.5% of its 2020 revenues for administration, operations and fundraising supplies, far below Canada Revenue Agency's recommended limit of 30% for administration and fundraising expenses.

Grants comprised 96% of the Foundation's disbursements and the target for grants was nearly attained with 93% of the budget for grants being achieved! As noted, despite the challenges presented due to Covid and the resulting curtailed operations and events, considerable success was realized, thanks to the incredible support of many generous donors.

Thank You

With gratitude to the many donors making a difference in enriching and sustaining the Place for Life in 2020.

Natalie Abramovich
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AIM Harrow Wind Farm LP
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Jessica Angulo
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