



TO: Planning and Budget Committee

SPONSOR: Vivek Goel, Vice-President and Provost

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AGENDA ITEM: 5

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Declaration of Property as Surplus to University Requirements: David Dunlap Observatory lands.

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

Before the Business Board may approve the disposal of University property, the “concurrence of the Academic Board is required, on the recommendation of the Planning and Budget Committee, to indicate that the property is surplus to University requirements.”

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

None.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The David Dunlap Observatory occupies a parcel of approximately 191 acres of land located at the municipal address of 123 Hillview Drive in the Town of Richmond Hill. Approximately 175 acres of land was a gift from Jessie Donalda Dunlap in 1932; who also donated the cost of the observatory buildings and associated equipment. In addition, approximately 16 acres of the property, the ‘Panhandle’, was gifted to the University by Clarence Chant and is currently leased to the Town of Richmond Hill pursuant to two leases.

When the Dunlap Observatory first opened it was a world-class observatory. When built, the 1.88 m telescope was the second-largest in the world and remains the largest in Canada. However, while the site was originally farmland, it is now surrounded by a highly urbanized area, and thus the encroachment of light pollution and changes in technology over the years has diminished the use as an observatory. The excellent reputation now enjoyed by the University in Astronomy and Astrophysics is based on data acquired at national and international observatories at the very best remote high-altitude sites or in space. Recent international external reviews have confirmed this reputation, e.g., “[This] *squarely places the University of Toronto as Canada’s pre-eminent home for astrophysical research.*” Further, regarding the graduate program: “*Within Canada there are few other such programs, if any, that can draw on similar depth and breadth of resources to operate an astrophysics*

program at a consistently high level. In broad terms our opinion is that the size and quality of the program make it competitive with many of the high-profile schools in the USA.”

Operation of the facilities and lands entails about \$800,000 of expense per year.

The University’s priority is to deliver on its academic purpose and it must use its resources in a manner that best facilitates education, research and discovery. With the agreement of the successors of Jessie Dunlap, the University is proposing that the operation of David Dunlap Observatory cease and the assets at that site be liquidated. The net proceeds will be invested in an endowment to support astronomy and astrophysics at the University. It is proposed that the legacy of the Dunlap gift be recognized through the establishment of a Dunlap Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics. The multi-faceted Institute will assume a prominent leadership position in research, teaching, advanced training, and public outreach. The creation and naming of the Institute will be subject to the appropriate governance approvals.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

All of the net proceeds received by the University from the sale of the David Dunlap Observatory lands will be allocated to an endowment which will name and support the Dunlap Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics.

RECOMMENDATION:

Be it recommended to the Academic Board:

THAT the David Dunlap Observatory lands be declared surplus to University requirements.