

THAT the 2020-2022 Environmental Advisory Committee Strategic Plan be provided to the Office of the CAO for review.

CARRIED

Council endorsed this recommendation on September 1, 2020,

Motion 2020-468

Moved by Councillor Hirsh

Seconded by Councillor MacNaughton

THAT the report of the Environmental Advisory Committee be adopted as presented; and

THAT the 2020-2022 Environmental Advisory Committee Strategic Plan be provided to the Office of the CAO for review.

CARRIED

Mandate of the Environmental Advisory Committee:

The EAC was re-established as a Council priority during the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency:

THAT the Environmental Advisory Committee be re-established as a Council priority; and

To reach out to encourage other municipalities, as well as the provincial and federal governments, and urge them to commit to protect our air, soil and water and to commit to use all the tools available to reduce the human activity that is causing this climate emergency and to promote a safe and sustainable planet for future generations.

[Excerpt from *Motion 2019-433 declaring a climate emergency (Moved by Councillor MacNaughton, Seconded by Councillor Hirsch, passed on May 29, 2019)*]

The mandate of the EAC, as outlined in their Terms of Reference (see Attachment #2) is to draw upon strategic advice and expertise within Prince Edward County, other environmental organizations, and key stakeholders to provide information and advice to Council on what environmental priorities could be initiated and how Prince Edward County could integrate an environmental lens across departments in order to foster sustainability.

On a volunteer basis, the EAC can engage with expertise in the community in order to identify and implement activities which support environmental awareness in Prince Edward County. Further, they can provide information to Council on aspects of Council's strategic priorities related to environmental concerns such as:

- mitigating the effects of climate change;
- encouraging water and energy conservation measures;

- foster waste reduction, reuse and recycling programs;
- encourage conservation or restoration of natural features and habitats which support the community's unique ecology, character and environmental assets, and;
- identify new business/employment/housing opportunities that climate change mitigation may offer.

Proposed Strategic Plan Goals and Priorities

The EAC's Proposed Strategic Plan outlines six (6) key goals, each having their own set of priorities:

1. Integrate an environmental lens into Official Plan, Secondary Plans, Policies and By-laws:

- *Ensure our new Official Plan incorporates green principles and considerations and propose revisions where an environmental "gap" currently exists, consider environmental impact implications.*
- *Language in secondary plans, policies and bylaws should be clear and firm.*
- *Develop municipal climate change adaptation and mitigation plans.*
- *Recognize climate change impacts in the planning process.*
- *Review policies and procedures for major Planning applications in environmentally sensitive areas.*
- *Encourage gentle density and innovative environmentally friendly building techniques.*
- *Reduce the carbon footprint of existing buildings, encourage jobs in retrofitting.*
- *Every Planning application should have a checkbox for consideration of climate impacts.*
- *Permanent protection of all environmentally important lands and waters in PEC.*
- *Reduce impact of climate change on County owned infrastructure.*
- *"Green" our procurement policy.*
- *Review and amend emergency plans.*
- *Investigate Incentives for landlords to retrofit old buildings for improved energy efficiency.*

Given the expanse of the priorities under this first goal, it is not feasible that all be addressed by staff by 2022, however staff are making progress on a number of priorities now, which include having the Draft Official Plan out for public comment again on the Have Your Say Website. The wording related to environmental components within the plan have been modified to ensure stronger language is used and more restrictive development rules are in place (i.e. policies related to ANSI's, PSW's and Woodlands). Section 6.2.12 specifically addresses strategies for adapting to climate change.

The Draft Official Plan also proposes to eliminate country lot subdivisions and reduce the number of severances per lot from two to one. The elimination of country lot

subdivisions and the reduction in severances allowed will mean less development on private services and thereby move toward greater compliance towards climate change policies as more housing is focused within the settlement areas where municipal water and waste water systems are in place or could be created. More people in a settlement area means a greater use of active modes of transportation as opposed to car dependent housing created in the rural areas away from services and shopping.

In terms of having input on planning files, currently there are only two Committees that are mandated by the Province to comment on such files and they include the Heritage Committee and the Accessibility Committee.

Staff recommend that the Environmental Advisory Committee be asked by Council to review the draft Official Plan and provide specific comments during the consultation period to inform Council decision-making when the final draft comes before Council in November, 2020.

A review of Policies and By-laws is also currently underway (there are currently 4,806 by-laws within the County). A presentation from the consultants is planned for the October 13, 2020 Council meeting that will inform the strategy moving forward for a comprehensive review of all policies.

Staff recommend that the Environmental Advisory Committee be asked by Council to identify which policy or policies are of greatest priority to achieve environmental objectives (outside of land use planning policies and bylaws) so that these can be made a focus in the early phases of policy/bylaw revisions to come before Council in 2021.

2. Adopt best practices on watershed protection/flooding and drought management:

- *Develop a headwater management policy for the County to improve the resilience of our water system.*
- *Review best practices for storm water management.*
- *Update flood plain map showing properties that endured an impact in 2017 and 2019.*
- *Develop targets for smaller watersheds in the County.*
- *Identify and recommend best practices in drought management.*

The goals and priorities that speak to watershed protection/flooding/drought management mandated through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to Quinte Conservation Authority and are not a municipal responsibility. The County's role as a municipality is to use the data from Quinte Conservation Authority to support analysis for site specific recommendations and policy review.

Quinte Conservation Authority has 1:100 year flood plain mapping available, for portions of the County, which was made possible through the Province and the FDRP (Flood Damage Reduction Program) in the late 1970's-early 1980's. A minor update from the Province was received through a memorandum only in 1991, which refined

portions of the Bay of Quinte/Lake Ontario flood plain elevation. Worth noting is that although not all areas in the County are mapped by the Province, the 1:100 year flood plain elevation is known and can be surveyed by conservation authority staff.

Further, conservation staff revised the spatial line work, by interpolating the 1:100 year flood plain elevation from a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) that was derived from LiDAR data (2009) and field-truthed by conservation staff via surveying and this information is provided to the County.

The GIS Department did provide emergency mapping support for our Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), and real-time information during the flood events of 2017 and 2019. Municipal staff modelled water levels at specific predicted levels to provide the Emergency Management Group with information showing what areas were likely to be at a greater risk, along with several other analysis products and tools (ex. creating digital survey for field staff to collect information on specific properties, and creating a heat map to show where sandbags were being deployed to help staff understand where the best place was to position large garbage collection bins).

The municipality is also a partner in implementing this watershed protection function largely through land use planning. The current (and proposed) Official Plan allows staff to require Hydrogeological Studies in order to ensure an adequate water supply prior to the creation of new lots. The Official Plan also stipulates that development in flood prone areas be prohibited and strict development setbacks are required from environmentally sensitive areas.

Staff recommend that Council ask the Environmental Advisory Committee to reconsider this priority, to clarify specifically what the municipal area of responsibility should be of focus in 2021.

3. Develop recommendations for tree canopy, landscape protection & regeneration, and wildlife diversity:

- *Create and monitor tree planting and canopy improvement initiatives – Quinte Conservation currently gives us a grade of C.*
- *Make recommendations on policies and bylaws on treatment of County tree canopy.*
- *Recognize that the County tree canopy is an asset.*
- *Develop a written invasive plant species management strategy for all municipal public lands.*
- *Road management should have an environmental lens.*
- *Take existing 38% natural habitat cover to 50% which improves chances for conserving natural biodiversity.*
- *Lead by example in tree planting on municipal property.*
- *Convert 50% of lawn area on 20 public properties to diverse, easy to maintain wildlife sustaining habitats.*
- *Not just an urban issue but rural as well.*

The municipality has committed to the development of a comprehensive tree policy that would impact future land use development in urban areas, and what occurs on municipally owned land. Historically, an Ad-Hoc Committee was focused on this topic, but Council reestablished this as the Tree Management Working Group on June 9, 2020 (as indicated in the EAC's Terms of Reference).

Pending review and comment from the EAC, a proposed Tree Policy and staff report is planning to come before Council for decision in late October or November, 2020.

Staff recommend deferring this priority until the draft policy and staff report can come before Council for a full discussion of the intended policy, and the implications of implementing the priorities under strategic goal #3.

4. Identify and promote sustainable agriculture & food opportunities and reduce food insecurity:

- *Increase the amount of farmland under regenerative agriculture.*
- *Create/restore rural habitat.*
- *“Sustainable PEC Brand” - develop local food and four-season cycle plan.*
- *Integrate the four food issues – economic, inclusion, nutrition and environment.*
- *Identify opportunities for biomass fuel generation as part of a renewable energy program.*
- *Idea of public gardens/a la “Food Allotment Plots” in the U.K.*
- *Sponsor partnerships with local agriculture sector.*
- *Understand which groups are already working towards similar goals, i.e. the Food Collective.*

The municipality recently established the Food Security Working Group, under the Community Economic Development Commission, at the request of several groups including the Food Collective and the PEC Learning Centre. The municipality has also provided some financial assistance in this area. As part of the 2019 and 2020 budgets, \$20,000 was given to the Food Collective, to support a range of food security initiatives in the County.

Given that the Food Security Working Group has not yet been established, staff suggest that Council redirect this priority to that working group, to avoid duplication of efforts and to consolidate resources.

Staff also recommend that Council direct the Food Security Working Group, through their terms of reference, to include one member recommended by each of the Environmental Advisory Committee and the Agricultural Advisory Committee to support a diversity of perspectives and a collaborative approach to food security issues.

5. Engage with community and recognize community environmental leaders, and recognize community environmental leaders:

- *Lead by Example.*
- *Work existing environmental organizations across the County – much is already being done, many skills and much knowledge can be tapped by the Committee.*
- *Create an Eco-champions recognition program.*
- *EAC to be an early stage sounding board for community members concerned about environmental impact of large-scale development plans.*
- *Advise Council and the public about best/established techniques and practices to achieve climate resilience.*
- *Use social media opportunities to engage county population.*
- *County website to add a common block to every page for “EnviroNews”*
- *Employ “nudge” techniques, encouraging environmental practices like online billing (we don’t have it yet).*
- *Engage more citizens about environmental sustainability, stewardship, protection and promotion activities.*

Under the terms of reference for all advisory committees of Council, the mandate is to provide advice on matters of expertise to Council within the scope their terms of reference, with Council having the final authority on the decisions made. Committees are to act as an advisory body and do not have any delegated authority. Recommendations for implementation must first be considered and approved by Council.

The Environmental Advisory Committee is well positioned to liaise with existing organizations and engage with citizens about environmental issues. Depending on the scope and scale of this engagement this could have a considerable impact on staff resources within our limited communications and outreach staffing.

In terms of engaging with the community, the County currently utilizes its social media channels and these channels have an audience that has been built up over the years. This can be leveraged to communicate key messages, including environmental messages, and could also be used to effectively promote an EnviroChampions program.

Staff recommend the creation of a dedicated environmental page for content that the Environmental Advisory Committee recommends would support education and engagement on environmental matters.

It is not feasible, however, to have a dedicated 'environews' block on every page, nor is it feasible to create and manage an EnviroChampions program given our current staff complement and priorities. Should that be the direction of Council, this work could be achieved with additional resources or refocusing of existing resources as part of the 2021 budget.

It is recommended that greater clarity be provided by Council as to the scope and purpose of these new initiatives to ensure staff understand the direction of Council.

6. Conduct research, identify sources and potential partnerships:

- *What has flood mitigation cost the County over the last three years – identify on a ward by ward basis.*
- *What has it cost residents – insurance? Uninsured expenses?*
- *What costs has the County assumed for remediation of environmental problems and environment driven repairs to infrastructure?*
- *Identify leading municipalities across Canada – mid size and semi-rural*
- *Conduct a vulnerability risk assessment of community and infrastructure.*
- *Promote partnerships with academic and other institutions, municipalities and associations.*

To date, since 2017 expenses incurred related to flood disaster/climate concerns account for over \$1.7 million in spending and are disclosed in annual financial reports to Council. The municipality does not collect personal data related to resident or business losses due to flooding events. Where the municipality does have access to information related to the research questions outlined in strategic goal #6, it would require considerable staff time to consolidate and analyze.

While the municipality does not do a vulnerability risk assessment, staff are in the process of developing an asset management plan, and are expected to bring an asset management plan for core infrastructure (roads, bridges, water/wastewater) before Council in the second quarter of 2021, to meet Provincial requirements for July 2021 implementation of such a plan. In the 2020 budget, staff recommended and Council approved a dedicated budget line of \$296,610 for Climate Emergency and moving forward, staff could explore incorporating climate adaptation into infrastructure spending such as road repair. Such a resiliency lens could be applied to the asset management planning as it evolves in the coming years.

Staff recommend Council identify which of these research priorities are most pressing to inform the 2021 workplan and operational budgets of the relevant departments.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

Approving the Proposed Strategic Plan as presented is daunting considering existing staff resources and the capacity of the municipality to implement existing priorities in other areas. An alternative approach would for Council to ask the Environmental Advisory Committee to reduce the scope of this plan or to identify a multi-year approach to the priorities identified.

While this might be easier for Council at this time, it is not recommended given the considerable work the Environmental Advisory Committee has put into identifying priorities to date, and eagerness of the membership and wider community partners to see action on these strategic goals.