

Climate Change Adaptation Plan moves forward

Aurora is moving forward with a plan to address and mitigate the fallout from climate change.

Council is set to move forward with the development of a previously-budgeted \$100,000 report this month that will look into climate change mitigation measures, primarily through a Community Energy Plan, aimed at reducing the causes of climate change.

“Adaptation measures are currently not being addressed by the Town,” said Natalie Kehle, Energy and Climate Change Analyst for the Town of Aurora. “An adaptation plan aims to reduce the risks of damage and harm to people, infrastructure and the environment from more extreme weather events by making adjustments to design and operational practices. Determining these adaptive measures is a mandatory planning requirement by the Province of Ontario.”

“Mitigation measures reduce the emissions of harmful greenhouse gases that cause climate change. On the other hand, adaptation measures prepare societies for changing climate to avoid damages or harm.” For example, increasing the size of stormwater culverts to reducing the risk of flooding due to more frequent and extreme rainfall events.

Should the decision made at last week's General Committee meeting be ratified by Council at the end of this month, a consultant will be retained to develop an adaptation plan for Town-owned infrastructure.

This plan will include a review of local climate data and climate projections to understand the “nature, severity and probability” of future climate changes in Aurora; outline the Town's vulnerability to extreme weather events and impacts to public infrastructure; identify risks and opportunities to public infrastructure and estimate the anticipated costs that could arise from damages or service disruptions; prioritize risks and opportunities and determine the adaptation measures required to increase resiliency; and “integrate a climate lens” into Town decision-making that will inform municipal staff.

The consultant will also be tasked with developing a Town-wide strategic plan that prioritizes climate change measures based on “urgency, return on investment and risk.”

“The plan will summarize and prioritize climate change measures that were identified from past projects and projects underway,” said Kehle. “It will also integrate necessary Town actions that address climate change identified by Town partners such as the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.”

In laying the foundation for a Climate Change Adaptation

Plan during last year's budget process, Council initially earmarked \$200,000 to bring the project to completion. Since that time, many municipalities have moved forward with plans of their own at that price range and now that the Town of Aurora has the ability to build off of the groundwork laid by others, staff believe this cost could now be slashed in half.

Initially, we had come up with a budget of \$200,000 based on our benchmarking with other municipalities who have done a similar type of climate change plan," said David Waters, Director of Planning for the Town of Aurora. "What we're hoping for is we can harvest a lot of what the Region has done through their climate change plan and reduce the cost by about 50 per cent, which is about \$100,000. There are a lot of these [studies] being prepared now because they are part of Provincial policy. They are required as input into your asset management plan. We're hoping to take advantage of economies of scale whereby the plan is very popular now and we can hopefully use that to reduce the cost."

This was welcome news to Council members last week.

"I am really happy to see this come forward and it is really exciting," said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. "I am also really excited to know that the budget is a lot less than we had anticipated. The expectations are outlined [in the report] and I am really looking forward to the next steps moving forward. It is really, really positive."

Added Mayor Mrakas, encouraging members of Council and the public alike to read the Region's Climate Change report, "It is a very extensive and detailed plan and I would like to thank Councillor Thompson for the suggestion during Budget that we hold off and wait for that Regional plan to be developed. At first blush now, it has saved us 50 per cent of the money."

By Brock Weir