

Advocacy, education eyed as Council considers merits of home retrofit grants

The Town of Aurora might not be in a place to offer grants for home energy retrofits at this point, but could do so in the future as part of the Town's Home Energy Retrofit Program.

Council is looking at implementing a made-in-Aurora program, and recommendations based on a feasibility study will be given further consideration at Council next week after consultants suggested going above and beyond advocacy and education towards providing financial retrofit grants at the municipal level was ?not a good fit at this time.?

The door, however, was left open to such a financial program in the medium- to long-term.

According to a report before Council, carbon emissions from Aurora homes are the largest contributor to Aurora's overall carbon footprint at 37 per cent, and a Community Energy Plan (CEP) was deemed ?essential? in helping reduce the community's emissions.

?[The study] looked at the opportunities and risks of a home energy retrofit program to determine if the Town should further explore developing a program, including offering financing to residents,? said Natalie Kehle, Aurora's Program Manager for Energy and Environment, in the Council report. ?Several financing models were reviewed and screened for suitability. Three loan models were found to be the most applicable to the Town for further consideration in a detailed design study. Other energy retrofit market elements initiated by the Town was shown to increase the number of home energy retrofits in Aurora, including energy coaching to support residents through the complex retrofit journey and energy retrofit education and outreach.?

Kehle notes that market changes in the field of home retrofits has had an impact on developing an Aurora-based program, including the wind-down of the Federal government's Greener Homes Loan Program, a cut-off for applications for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Community Efficiency Financing Program, while, conversely, the Region of York is developing a Greener Homes Program.

Short-term goals identified in the Home Energy Retrofit Program include supporting the launch of the Region's Greener Homes Program this spring, while providing outreach to and engagement with local residents on available programs.

Under the medium-term range of three to five years, the Program recommends exploring a local retrofit grant program for homeowners with low income, funded through the Town's Green Initiatives Reserve Fund, ?with a goal to maintain principal balance for long-term reserve sustainability.?

Longer-term goals, in a window of five to 10 years, include collaboration with the Region on the development of retrofit incentives, financing programs with the Region and area partners ?regarding the consideration of a regional cost-effective, low-risk financing program for home retrofits,? and the potential of a region-wide regulatory tool to reduce emissions from existing buildings.

?There has been some action at the Regional and local municipal level,? said Alex Hill of Dunsky Energy and Climate Advisors, presenting the draft plan to local lawmakers at the Committee level this month. ?York Region will be launching the York Greener Homes online platform, which includes a home energy rating to give you a reading as to the energy performance of the homes in the communities within the region, as well as home energy coaching services that can help you identify and accomplish retrofit improvements in a home. Markham and Richmond Hill are also undertaking a similar feasibility study for a financing program, and I'll remind you that the conclusion of the financing program feasibility study that we conducted was that it is not a good fit at this time for the Town of Aurora to offer financing for home energy retrofits and to play the role of a bank, but instead to look to see if opportunities may arise at the regional and provincial or federal level in the future and to work with those.

?In the short-term actions, it starts off with low or no cost value adds that leverage the regional and utility programs, collect data and advocate for growing support, so essentially use the resources that you have on hand, work within the context of initiatives that are happening at the regional, provincial and federal level, and try to bring as much of those benefits to the homeowners of Aurora as

possible through that work?. It's focusing on education and outreach to the community, support the development and implementation of the York Region Greener Homes Program. For instance, make sure that homeowners in Aurora are aware of that opportunity and that they're taking advantage of it. Collaborate with municipal partners for further support for the Regional program and this is all achievable through the existing Town resources and budget.?

Regarding the medium-term goal of a small retrofit program for income-qualifying residents, Hill added this was, in their view, a financially-sustainable model.

?I think there's an envelope of somewhere in the order of \$50,000 a year that can be taken from that fund without diminishing its overall value. That would focus on homeowners who qualify for the low income retrofit opportunities offered by Enbridge and Save on Energy at the provincial level and allowing them to do more and attract more of those funds from those opportunities to homeowners in Aurora by giving them matching funds and a small grant to

encourage that, sort of the missing money to get them to do those projects. ?Longer term, as the opportunities emerge and perhaps there are new initiatives at the Regional level and perhaps at the provincial or federal level, so the first could be work at the Regional level to establish a York Region incentive program that could help pay for home energy retrofits, could also be to work with the other municipalities to establish a regional financing

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