

Environmental Advisory Committee should be re-established: Council

Local environmental advocates could once again have a greater say in the decision-making process as Aurora moves to revive the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee.

Until 2018, citizen members of the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) were appointed to review recommendations prior to a Council decision through a specialized green lens but their work, along with the work of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee, were brought under the wider umbrella of the Community Advisory Committee established in the current term of Council.

But, according to a motion before Council this week from Mayor Tom Mrakas and Councillor Rachel Gilliland, it is time to bring back this specific group of concerned citizens.

“The Town of Aurora declared a Climate Emergency for the purposes of naming and deepening our commitment to protecting our ecosystems and identifying key criteria to help reduce our carbon footprint and protect our community from the impacts of climate change,” say Mayor Mrakas and Councillor Gilliland in their motion. “The Town is prioritizing the process of creating a Climate Action Plan for the Town of Aurora, focused on reducing emissions and adaptation at the community level.

“Local governments around the world have recognized the extreme emergency that climate change embodies and have expedited their own actions, and have called on provincial and national governments to strengthen action on climate change. The Town would benefit from a dedicated committee to address environmental and climate adaptation at a community level to discuss ongoing climate change, protections, energy conservation, education, environmental matters, and contribute comments to the Climate Action Plan and Community Energy Plan.”

Should Council vote in favor of the motion, the Environmental Advisory Committee will be comprised of five citizen members and one Council member and the mandate of the Community Advisory Committee will be amended to remove environmental initiatives from its portfolio.

The move to re-establish the EAC coincided with a delegation made to Council at last week's General Committee meeting by Claire Malcolmson, Executive Director of the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, who encouraged local lawmakers to take an active part in protecting tenets of the Province's Lake Simcoe Protection Plan as legislation is reviewed at Queen's Park.

“Our big development lobby is very effective in Ontario right now. Growth is their major agenda and growth hurts the lake,” said Ms. Malcolmson, underscoring the problem of phosphorus in run-off bound for the Lake Simcoe watershed. “We really need the Province to know that they need to do the job they signed up to do when we had unanimous party support for the passage of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act in 2008.

“We're asking municipalities around the watershed to call on the Government of Ontario to demonstrate their commitment to clean water, protecting what matters most, by ensuring the provisions in the Lake Simcoe Plan that protect water quality are not weakened and that policies protecting natural heritage are strengthened so that we meet the targets of the Lake Simcoe Plan, which we are not meeting.”

According to Ms. Malcolmson, the initial target was to reduce phosphorus draining into Lake Simcoe to 44 tonnes per year after a peak of 100 tonnes per year in the 1980s.

“The warning was we would go back up to 94 if we didn't take action,” she said. “We have exceeded that warning in the last 10 years. The average in the last 10 years has been 90 tonnes per year, much higher than the target of 44. There is no indication we can take our foot off the gas on phosphorous loads. Our organization is concerned that the phosphorous target would be challenged in the review of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and we think that absolutely should not happen without far more robust science than we

have seen coming from the Province on this.

?There is a really big link between climate change impact and phosphorus loads in the lake. The belief at the moment is the increased strength and severity of precipitation? are driving heavy flows into the lake at slightly new times of the year; those March and April rain storms on top of ice and snow, for example. Those just throw masses of phosphorus into the lake.?

Ms. Malcolmson's delegation was received by Council and Mayor Mrakas said the Coalition's recommendations would be subject to a future motion. Councillor Gilliland echoed this enthusiasm and said issues like this would be perfect fodder for a revived EAC.

?Hopefully we can include some of these discussions and concerns through the EAC side and hopefully that motion that is being put forward will enact a committee dedicated to climate change and adaptation in this world, especially Aurora,? said Councillor Gilliland. ?I know we care about our community, we care about our climate, we care about trying to be cognizant of what we do to protect the environment, and this just?complements that.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter