

Future Town decisions should be viewed through 'climate lens,' says Councillor

Decisions made at Town Hall should be considered through a 'climate lens,' according to Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

The Councillor who previously brought forward a successful motion for the Town of Aurora to declare a 'climate emergency,' said going down this route would help staff and lawmakers alike 'better understand the environmental impacts' of decisions that need to be made.

'The Town of Aurora declared a Climate Emergency for the purposes of naming and deepening our commitment by protecting human health, eco systems and infrastructure by identifying key criteria to help reduce our carbon footprint and protect our community from the impacts of climate change,' said the Councillor in her motion. 'Town operations and Council would benefit from incorporating a climate lens approach to better understand the impacts and/or achievements made by Council decisions and overall operations. A climate lens will help raise awareness amongst proponents of infrastructure systems to integrate climate change considerations into the core of project planning and design phases, as well as a project's long-term climate risk.'

Although Councillor Gilliland called for a climate lens be included on staff reports to Council and General Committee by June of this year, Council voted in favour of an amendment for a report by June on the nuances of what a climate lens might entail.

'Over the last year, it has been pretty interesting having discussion with staff on how to integrate environmental awareness and climate change considerations on core projects of planning and design phases as well as project and long-term climate risk,' said Councillor Gilliland. 'With much research, we came to the conclusion that a climate lens approach or assessment seems to be the newly adopted measure to evaluate climate risk and other municipalities, other levels of government such as Halton Hills, Kingston, and even the Federal government. I do believe the Town operations and Council would really benefit from incorporating a climate lens approach and help us better understand the environmental impacts and achievements made by Council decisions.'

'I have also left it pretty open for staff to investigate ways to achieve this. Not all projects are equal. Hence why the climate lens assessment approach.'

While Councillor Michael Thompson said he supported the 'approach' for using a climate lens, the devil was in the details.

'There has been a fair bit of variation I have seen, whether it be Infrastructure Ontario or some of the other municipalities in terms of what their approach is,' he said. 'If we're going to use the definition from Infrastructure Ontario, which is just for projects of a certain value, size and scope, that is fine' As a suggestion, I would think perhaps everybody around the table might appreciate a report from staff just to define what that climate lens approach really is, how it is applied, and whether it is applicable or not.'

Similar concerns were voiced by Councillor Harold Kim, who said the phrase 'climate lens' was 'pretty high level.'

Researching places like Kingston, Councillor Kim said the city has created a climate leadership division, a community climate change fund, and have attached money to the initiative.

'I would like to know what type of model is going to be used here in Aurora,' he said. 'I am all for creating local solutions [and] inspiring others to do the same. We always want Aurora to be the leader and I thank Councillor Gilliland for putting this out there. Does it need [to be applied] to current pending reports Council is anticipating? Are those necessary pillars of information we need before we go onto this next step? Are we equipped with information and pillars to go ahead with this?'

Added Councillor John Gallo: 'I think we're all on the same page that we need a report back to Council because we're jumping from staff [investigating] ways to include a climate lens approach to Town operations, and I think everyone is okay with that, we're jumping to implementing it in the second clause. There is something missing in between there. That, to me, would be the next step in order to define that, see what it looks like and have a discussion around it.'

The amended motion calling for just such a report was passed unanimously by Council.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter