



Date: Wednesday, February 7, 2024

From: Niall Loble, Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: Climate Initiatives – Budget Allocation 2024

Report CES2024-001

This document and its attachments are public and available in an accessible format upon request.

Recommendation

That, pending approval of the 2024 Budget, staff be directed to allocate funding from the approved Climate Initiatives funding toward securing an Environmental Initiatives Officer for a 3-year term; and

That Council add an additional \$45,000 to the Climate Initiatives Budget to support this position; and

That the projects included in the Budget Request 'Corporate Climate Action Plan Implementation' be priorities for the Environmental Initiatives Officer to address, and, That a new Reserve be established to support the work of the Township in addressing Climate Change; and

That 25% of any Operating Surplus from 2023 and subsequent years, be placed into this new Climate Change Reserve to fund initiatives directed by the Corporate Climate Action Plan; and

That the Environmental Initiatives Officer be directed to explore all relevant external funding opportunities to advance, in Georgian Bluffs, the work of the Corporate Climate Action Plan, 'Committed to Change' and the Grey County Plan, 'Going Green in Grey'; and

That the Environmental Initiatives Officer be directed to work in partnership with Grey County and its member municipalities, and the communities in and around Georgian Bluffs to implement and contribute to education and demonstrating leadership in climate change addressing actions.



Background

In November, 2023, Council endorsed unanimously the Township's first Corporate Climate Action Plan, seeking to address the impacts of the operation of the Township on Climate Change through seeking ways to offset and mitigate green house gas emissions, and to lead the Township in preparing to meet increased impacts of Climate Change through implementing Climate Change adaptation strategies. This plan was formulated with significant community engagement and input and sought to prioritize the vital role the Township has in being seen as a leader for community in implementing climate related actions into its work.

During Budget discussions in December 2023 and January 2024, Council reviewed and prioritized a large number of budget priorities, including Climate Change related work. Several of these projects have been incorporated in the draft 2024 Budget, reviewed by Council on January 30th.

During the deliberations on Budget, members of community connected with Council through delegations, letters and meetings, seeking dedicated staffing support for the Climate Change work at the Township, and on January 17th, Council directed staff to work with community in how the Township might reconsider its 2024 climate related budget activity.

On January 30th, as part of the Draft Budget discussions, staff indicated that they had included in the draft budget the financial impact of climate actions discussed on December 4th, but had decoupled the budget request from specific actions, so that this budget could be used more flexibly. This report makes recommendations on alternative ways Council could consider investing in Climate Change through the 2024 Budget. If so directed, staff will amend, if needed, the Draft 2024 Budget based on these discussions.

Analysis

The Corporate Climate Action Plan identified that meeting the commitments established within the plan would require dedicated efforts and resources over subsequent years and that effective change toward lowering climate impacts would require investment. The evidence is clear that investment in climate related work collectively, addressing and seeking to minimize impacts to climate will pay dividends in the future. Climate change is already impacting municipal operations, services and infrastructure; costs are increasing related to climate change and expected to continue to increase. Indeed, the Financial Accountability Office stated in its 2023 report, that climate change related weather impacts will have a \$25 billion impact on infrastructure in the next decade; much of this related to municipally owned and operated infrastructure. Through societal investment in seeking to reduce, eliminate and reverse impacts on climate, the future exponential cost increases in these areas can be reduced, minimized and avoided.



In the Budget Request made in December, 2023, it was identified that in order to implement actions within the Corporate Climate Action Plan, resources were required in respect of funding toward initiatives, and staffing resources dedicated toward implementing those initiatives, monitoring ongoing work, securing funding opportunities, and seeking to work in collaboration with partners and community in advancing climate related work across the Township.

The Draft Budget, based on the priorities of Council identified in December, identified resources toward initiatives, but did not support staffing resource allocation toward supporting these. Concern has been shared by community, and the Climate Action Working Group, that this will result in climate change being a 'side of the desk' project at the Township, rather than supported by dedicated resources seeking to embed climate related work across Township operations.

The Clean Air Partnership, FCM and ICLEI partnered to develop a report (2019) that focused on climate change plans and their implementation across a range of municipalities, both larger urban centres and more rural smaller municipalities. This report identified that staffing resources were linked to successful implementation – that lack of dedicated staff resources and high rates of staff turnover negatively impacted climate change actions. Further, the report indicated that dedicated staffing tended to support higher levels of organisational climate literacy and supported innovative community partnerships – which were also highlighted as a key to success.

Council directed staff to reconsider how budget could be allocated to support work in a sustainable way in January, 2024.

Staff are proposing that the resources allocated in 2024 be seen as flexible (rather than project specific) in how they are allocated so that these could be directed toward a staffing position on a temporary, three-year term. Staff are seeking that an additional \$45,000 over each of the next three years, be directed to climate initiatives, which would support a full-time position on a three year term, and would ensure support for the Foodcycler Pilot to be continued in 2024.

If staff resources are able to be onboarded, one of the key tasks for the new position will be looking to work in partnership across Grey County and with community locally in seeking innovative ways to deliver projects within the Corporate Climate Action Plan, and specifically the initiatives within the Budget Request made in late 2023. This will include seeking funding support for both the position, and its work.

In order that a sustainable approach to the funding of climate related projects is supported over coming years, staff are recommending that a new reserve be established, dedicated to funding climate change and environmental initiatives. It is proposed that this reserve would be funded through dedicating 25% of any operating surplus at the end of 2023, and in future years, to this reserve.



Financial Impact

It is proposed that an additional \$45,000 be added to the 2024 Budget to support a dedicated staff position to support and implement climate change related activities and that 25% of any operating surplus in 2023 and in future years be directed to a Climate and Environmental Initiatives Reserve.

Strategic Priorities

3. Demonstrate and Enhance Environmental Stewardship

The Township of Georgian Bluffs strives to become a leader in Environmental Stewardship by reducing energy consumption, reducing solid waste, increasing diversion rates of recyclable materials, and lessening the environmental impact of existing and future infrastructure through innovation and upgrading.

Objectives:

3.1 Continually strive to reduce environmental footprint by reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions to minimize climate change.

Conclusion

In response to Council direction staff are seeking direction to enhance the funding allocation toward Climate Initiatives informed by the Corporate Climate Action Plan through Budget 2024 by supporting the creation of an Environmental Initiatives Officer staffing position on a three year term and adding an additional \$45,000 to the budget to support this.

Respectfully Submitted: Niall Loble, Acting CAO/Director Community & Environmental Services.