

Priorities Committee Meeting_Jun18_2024

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE

Climate Resilience Plan

Report Purpose

To provide Priorities Committee with an overview and obtain feedback on the Climate Resilience Plan, "Degrees of Resilience: Our Climate Adaptation Compass."

Our Strategic Goals

Goal 2 - Healthy and Safe Community

Goal 3 - Responsible Development

Goal 2 Priority - Social supports that enhance community well-being and safety, and build community connection

Goal 3 Priority - Investment in our infrastructure that supports development and complete communities

Goal 3 Priority - Environmental stewardship that addresses climate change and demonstrates responsible use of land and natural resources

Report

Background

In Spring 2022, Planning and Development Services put forward a business case for creating a Climate Resilience Plan for Strathcona County, contingent upon obtaining grant funding through the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC) under the Climate Resilience Capacity Building Program. On September 6, 2022, Council designated a political contact for membership with ICLEI Canada (Local Governments for Sustainability) to participate in the Building Adaptive and Resilient Communities (BARC) program to facilitate the development of the Climate Resilience Plan as part of the grant application process. In December 2022, Strathcona County was awarded grant funding of \$79,950.50 from MCCAC for climate resilience planning, with a deadline for project completion of July 31, 2024. This report provides an update on the status of the Plan and an overview of its outcomes to date.

Overview

The Climate Resilience Plan development was led by a project team of staff from ICLEI Canada and Strathcona County and supported by an internal working group made up of County staff from affected departments. ICLEI Canada facilitated six internal staff workshops on the topics of climate change impact identification, risk assessment, action identification, action validation and implementation. Workshops were attended by 28 staff from 12 County departments and one Councillor, who identified over 300 potential climate change impacts. Of the long list of identified potential climate change impacts, 39 refined and consolidated climate change impact statements related to projected changes in temperature, changes in precipitation patterns, extreme weather and wildfires were carried forward into the vulnerability and risk assessment process, which prioritized 16 impacts for action and implementation planning.

The action planning process generated hundreds of potential ideas that were distilled into 24 prioritized actions deemed either urgent, high, or medium priority for implementation consideration.

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Climate Resilience Plan Outcomes

Greenhouse gas-driven climate change is occurring on a global scale. Canada is warming at roughly double the average rate seen globally. Climate models project that the climate will continue to warm as long as greenhouse gases are emitted into the atmosphere. The intensity of climate change and its associated current and future impacts will depend upon the level of mitigation that can be achieved globally. This means while emissions reduction (mitigation) efforts are vitally important, we must also prepare our communities for the changes and impacts that are already underway and will continue to intensify. Local projections for Strathcona County indicate increase in average temperatures in all seasons, more extreme weather events, and greater overall uncertainty in weather patterns. Our region can expect to see greater instances of drought, wildfire, heavy rainfall events, and localized flooding events, among other impacts.

Addressing climate change necessitates a dual approach: minimizing future changes to the climate (i.e., mitigating greenhouse gas emissions) and adapting to the changes that are already underway. The phrase, “avoid the unmanageable, and manage the unavoidable,” is often used to capture this intent. The scope of the Climate Resilience Plan is to focus on “managing the unavoidable” through the identification of resilience-building actions that will help prepare Strathcona County to contend with and adapt to the local impacts of climate change, many of which are already occurring.

Using ICLEI’s BARC Framework, Strathcona County completed three of five milestones to develop the Climate Resilience Plan: initiate, research, and plan. The fourth and fifth milestones, implement and monitor/review, will be the next steps for this work. The planning process generated 24 adaptation actions with additional supporting actions that will form the basis for those next steps. Four themes emerged from the adaptation action planning process: (1) built environment, (2) people, health, and economy, (3) natural environment and agriculture, and (4) resilient governance. Implementation will require the ongoing development of action scope and timelines, and identification of immediate next steps, lead departments, relevant current practices/initiatives to build on, and monitoring metrics to evaluate progress.

The Cost of Doing Nothing

The Cost of Doing Nothing (CODN) report was prepared by ICLEI Canada for Strathcona County as supplementary information to the Climate Resilience Plan. As Strathcona County navigates the increasing impacts of climate change, understanding the financial and social ramifications of inaction is paramount. The report serves as a guide for local decision-makers, framing climate data within the broader national and provincial contexts and focusing on the costs and impacts across various climate hazards. Climate hazards of focus in the CODN report for Strathcona County are extreme weather and precipitation, extreme heat, and wildfires.

The financial costs of climate-related events are substantial and growing. For example, wildfire management in Canada has consistently required investments of \$800 million to \$1.4 billion annually, protecting critical infrastructure, but also reflecting just a portion of the overall damages incurred.

Locally, Strathcona County witnessed significant wildfire events in 2009 and 2018, with estimated costs of \$4.7 million and \$1-2 million respectively, highlighting the direct impact on the County’s financial resources. Indirect costs that can be more difficult to quantify

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(e.g., municipal service disruptions, supply chain disruptions, transportation network interruptions, business interruptions, power outages, food/water shortages, as well as other significant non-market costs to human health, well-being, and the natural environment) are also considered within the report. Where applicable, local events (e.g., wildfire, flood, windstorms, etc.) are highlighted as indicators of possible future costs of inaction.

Council and Committee History

September 6, 2022 Council approved: THAT Councillor Corey-Ann Hartwick be designated as the political contact for Strathcona County's membership with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), for a term beginning on September 12, 2022, and continuing until September 12, 2023, to facilitate access to the Building Adaptive and Resilient Communities (BARC) program for the development of a Climate Resilience Plan for Strathcona County.

Other Impacts

Policy: n/a

Financial/Budget: n/a

Legislative/Legal: n/a

Interdepartmental: Planning and Development Services; Emergency Services; Recreation, Parks and Culture; Transportation Engineering and Operations; Fleet and Facility Management; Financial and Strategic Services; Utilities; Communications; Family and Community Services; Transit; Intergovernmental Affairs, Business Excellence

Master Plan/Framework: Environmental Framework, Agriculture Master Plan

Communication Plan

The Climate Resilience Plan is a strategic initiative that supports the Environmental Framework. A communications strategy has been developed to support the Environmental Framework, which encompasses directly related policies, plans, and projects. A StoryMap platform and social media are some of the tools used to tell our Environmental Framework story, which includes the Climate Resilience Plan.

Enclosures

- 1 Climate Resilience Plan – Degrees of Resilience: Our Climate Adaptation Compass"
- 2 Investing in a Climate Resilient Future: Cost of Doing Nothing Report
- 3 Strathcona County's Climate Resilience Plan presentation