

Community Energy Plan for Aurora set to move forward

Council is poised to give the green light to a new Community Energy Plan this month, one which sets environmental and sustainability goals through 2025.

Lawmakers gave the tentative green light to the Community Energy Plan (CEP) while meeting at the Committee level last week and the Plan could receive final ratification on January 26.

First proposed to Council by John Abel, who served as Councillor from 2010 to 2018, the resulting CEP provides recommendations on how the community as a whole can improve energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions while also fostering a culture of conservation for Aurora.

Community energy planning helps address Aurora's role in the global climate crisis and is aligned with the Town's 2019 Climate Energy Declaration, said Natalie Kehle, Energy and Climate Change Analyst for the Town. By declaring a climate emergency, the Town deepened its commitment to reducing emissions and protecting the community from the impacts of climate change, in keeping with the Paris Accord.

Aurora's Official Plan directs the Town to develop policies and programs designed to reduce per-capita greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds by 2031 and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors. The Official Plan also requires the development of Town-wide Community Energy Plan to detail energy use requirements, establish a plan to reduce energy demand, consider the use of alternative and renewable energy generation options, and ensure that communities are designed to optimize passive solar gains.

If adopted, the CEP will provide a pathway towards the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent from 2018 levels by 2050.

Strategies within the plan includes the design and implementation of a tiered building code or green standard. The plan finds that homes are responsible for 45 per cent of all energy use in Town and 37 per cent of total emissions. In the plan, developers of new homes would be encouraged to meet higher levels of energy efficiency when building new homes. There would also be, if adopted, a voluntary deep energy retrofit program for existing homes, looking at ways to increase energy efficiency through a whole-house lens.

Businesses, which the study finds are responsible for 16 per cent of all energy used in the community and 14 per cent of emissions, would be subject to similar proposals.

Transportation and transit also figure into the CEP. Findings in the report indicate that transportation was found to be responsible for 26 per cent of total energy used in the Town and 37 per cent of total emissions. A personal vehicle, the report notes, is responsible for 99 per cent of all transportation energy and emissions.

The first strategy aims to reduce the impacts of travel through mode shift, said consultants leading the CEP. This means encouraging other methods of travel such as cycling, walking or taking transit instead of driving. The second strategy aims to support the adoption of electrical vehicles by developing a plan to increase EV charging infrastructure.

This infrastructure would be contingent on support from upper levels of government, as is the overall goal of the CEP.

A significant effort will be required to meet these reductions by the Town, agencies, homeowners and businesses. While the CEP strategies are significant, there remains a gap in achieving 80 per cent emissions reduction by 2050. An additional effort by federal and provincial governments, as well as advances in technologies will be needed. The plan intentionally sets a 30-year planning gap horizon, and the Town will continue to evaluate progress over time and identify ways to close the gap. The CEP will guide the Town

of Aurora and the wider community to reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions. A strong focus on implementation, governance and modelling is essential to the Plan's success.?

At its first sweep of the plan, Council signalled its overall support.

While both Councillors Harold Kim and Wendy Gaertner expressed reservations on the emphasis on EVs, citing the large amount of resources needed to produce the lithium required to power them, they said a CEP was the right way forward.

?I think the community energy plan is necessary and anything that is important, especially like the environment, has to be a grassroots movement that has to start from the ground up from an action perspective,? said Councillor Kim. ??Getting individuals activated, municipalities have a big role in the education, marketing and communication.?

Added Councillor Gaertner: ?I am fully in support of the vision, the goals and the targets of the CEP. The bottom line is that we are at war with nature, or maybe nature is at war with us, and we just can't keep going on the way we were. An energy plan is a no-brainer.?

Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who made the original motion for Aurora to declare a Climate Emergency said the report before Council, and the draft CEP, was ?the very first step? in moving forward.

?I have seen some really great results from this report, everything from identifying the energies, where efficiencies are, compact housing, carbon sequestering, all these really major points,? she said. ?We need to identify how we're going to actually be reducing energy and we have to start somewhere. We have to do it by educating ourselves, educating the public and getting that buy in.?

Additional concerns were noted by Councillor Michael Thompson, who questioned the financial implications of the plan. While he didn't disagree with the findings, funding was a missing piece of the puzzle, he said, particularly rebate and retrofit programs for homes and businesses.

?I think it is important to just clearly communicate there is a cost to this program,? he said.

Added Mayor Tom Mrakas: ?We are taking a leadership role here in the Town of Aurora but at the same time we don't want to give people a false impression that we can achieve all of these things without the other two levels of government helping us out. It will take all of us working together on this.

?We have a lot of great ideas, we have a great plan, and we're putting it out there? and doing all this work to find efficiencies to create a better environment for our community, but we have always said the environment doesn't just end at our borders. This is right across our community, the next community, the province, the country, the whole world. We all need to work together on this.?

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