



Climate Action Report Card for Peterborough City Council

Introduction

In October 2022, residents of Peterborough elected a new City Council, which officially assumed office on November 15, 2022. This document is an assessment of the measures taken by Council between November 15 2022, and December 31 2023 to address the unfolding crisis of global warming and climate change.

An assessment such as this is only relevant within a broader context which includes the following:

- **A world-wide climate emergency:** the rising proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is heating up the planet and causing significant changes to the climate. The evidence of this can already be seen in the increased incidence of heat waves, droughts, wildfires, storms, and floods - and their increasing severity. In the absence of decisive action on a global scale to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses and preserve natural repositories of carbon such as forests and wetlands, climate change will make our planet increasingly inhospitable to both humanity and to non-human forms of life - and may ultimately threaten the destruction of civilization and even the extinction of humanity itself.
- **The responsibility for the climate emergency** is largely borne by wealthy, developed nations, which founded their prosperity, to a significant degree, on the burning of fossil fuels.

Climate Action by Previous Councils

As it took office, the current Peterborough City Council became heir to a number of policies put in place and actions taken by its predecessors to reduce energy consumption and lower GHG emissions, as well as to recognize the threat posed by climate change and chart a course toward future reductions in GHG emissions. A proper assessment of the record of the current Peterborough City Council in dealing with the climate emergency needs to begin with a recognition of what these were, and their significance:

- Beginning in 2011, work began to reduce the energy consumption of various municipal facilities.
- In 2016, the first **Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP)** was developed. It set a target of a 30% reduction in GHG emissions from 2011 levels by 2031.
- In 2019, a **Climate Emergency** was declared. A new target was set for reducing GHG emissions: they were to be cut to 45% below 2011 levels by 2030, and to net zero by 2050.
- Also in 2019, 7,205 **streetlights** were upgraded with light emitting diode light fixtures, lowering their electricity consumption by 52%.
- In 2020, the **Climate Change Reserve (CCR)** was established. Council voted to fund the Reserve with an annual allocation of \$426,400. The reserve was to be used to fund various climate change action initiatives. Among the initiatives which were funded prior to the current Council's assumption of office were the following:
 - The Alternative Fuel Study for transit.
 - Installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure at municipal facilities.
 - Installation of EV chargers for public use at Del Cray Park and the Simcoe Street Parking Garage.

- A program design study for the residential Home Energy Efficiency Program (HEEP) which, when implemented, will provide loans to homeowners for home energy retrofits.
- The City's contribution for an application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for capital funding for the HEEP program.
- The Green Economy Peterborough Hub, which supports local businesses in implementing GHG reduction plans.
- Support for the construction of Fire Station #2, which is to be a net zero building.
- A funding application for the Community Buildings Retrofit project – which will conduct a decarbonization feasibility study for a portfolio of corporate buildings, determining the capital budgets required to achieve 50% GHG reductions by 2030 and 80% by 2050.
- The staff position of Climate Change Coordinator.
- Also in 2020, Council oversaw the formation of the City of Peterborough Holdings Incorporated (CPHI), of which the City of Peterborough is the sole shareholder. CPHI operates 27 renewable energy facilities, which together produce 48.3 MW of power. These include:
 - 6 hydroelectric generating stations
 - 19 solar facilities
 - 2 biogas plants - one burns methane from the Bensfort Road landfill, the other burns methane generated by the Kennedy Road Wastewater Treatment plant.
- In the 2022 budget, the CCR allocation was amended to include an annual CPI (Consumer Price Index) adjustment.
- In 2021, planning proceeded for the Source Separated Organics Project, which would create a municipal composting facility for residential waste.
- An anti-idling campaign was implemented.
- A “Climate Action at Home” video series, promoting home energy upgrades, was produced, in partnership with Green-Up and the County of Peterborough.
- The Community Solar Photovoltaic Potential Survey project was carried out, in partnership with Sir Sandford Fleming College. This produced an app to help residents and businesses in preliminarily determining if their properties were suitable for solar technologies. It also provided a list of installers.
- As part of the 2022 Budget, Council approved a 1-year pilot program to provide free public transit for youth 12 and younger.
- Tree planting and canopy restoration projects were approved.
- Improvements to the cycling network, including the conversion of a section of Bethune Street into a bike friendly corridor with limited vehicular traffic, were approved.
- The City's Official Plan was updated. Approved by the Province of Ontario in 2023, it calls for the creation of “complete communities” – dense, mixed-use, walkable, cyclable, transit friendly neighborhoods. The plan, if fully implemented, should reduce residents' reliance on private automobiles for transportation, and thus reduce GHG emissions.

The Limits of Climate Action by Previous Councils

However, the limits of this progress should also be acknowledged:

- Corporate Emissions, (from City of Peterborough operations) which the City has been most successful in reducing, make up only about 5% of Peterborough's overall emissions.
- While the city did achieve a reduction in corporate emissions of 18% between the 2011 base year and 2021, the most recent year for which emissions data is available, much of this reduction was the

result of action by the provincial government to eliminate coal-fired power generation from the province's electricity grid. Also, the decline in corporate emissions has slowed in recent years. It continued in 2020 mainly because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2020 and 2021, as the effects of COVID became less severe, Corporate Emissions rose by 3%.

- City staff have projected that if planned projects are fully implemented, Corporate Emissions will fall in years to come. **However, staff have also projected that even in this optimistic scenario, Peterborough will miss its corporate emissions reduction target by a significant margin, achieving a reduction from the 2011 baseline of only 33%, rather than the 45% target.**
- The new arena, branch library, and (future) aquatics centre, now under construction in Morrow Park, will incorporate a number of energy saving and emission reduction features. However, its main heat source will be a gas boiler, rather than a ground or air source heat pump. It will make a significant contribution to Corporate GHG emissions as soon as it begins operation, even as the City considers ways to make deep reductions in GHG emissions from its buildings inventory.
- Community Emissions (those which come from private homes and businesses, and privately owned vehicles) which make up approximately 95% of total emissions, have not been significantly reduced. A June 12, 2023 report from City staff indicated that while some reductions came about because of the elimination of coal-fired generating plants from the provincial electricity grid, and that a further temporary reduction resulted from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall reduction in Community Emissions had been small, and that future reductions are likely to be well below target levels. Staff projected that if all planned programs are implemented, with a high degree of "uptake," a reduction of 14% below the 2011 baseline would be achieved by 2030, well below the target of 45%. This estimate assumes an increase in electric vehicle use that would come about in future as a result of Federal government subsidies for electric vehicles and recently announced Federal electric vehicle mandates.

Climate Action by the Present Council

Much of the climate action initiated by the present council involves building upon or following up on plans and projects initiated by previous Councils. The following are some such actions:

- In the 2023 capital budget, Council allocated \$460,065 for the Climate Change Reserve.
- The Alternative Fuels Study continued, and was expanded from its initial focus on transit vehicles to encompass the entire City fleet.
- The Application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to fund the Home Energy Efficiency Program continued. As part of the application process, Council approved an LIC (Local Improvement Charge). If HEEP goes forward, homeowners making successful applications for HEEP loans will be able to repay their loan through the LIC, which will be attached to their property tax bill. They will also be able to pass the charge along to subsequent owners of the property.
- The Community Buildings Retrofit study continued.
- Council oversaw the beginning of work on a new Climate Change Action Plan. Consultants were engaged, and they began community consultations.
- Council continued with efforts to preserve and expand the tree canopy.
- Council passed the bylaw implementing the new residential waste collection arrangements, including residential compost collection through the green bin program.
- Council passed the Central Area Design Guidelines and the Mixed-Use Corridor Urban Design Guidelines, which elaborated in concrete terms on how the Official Plan was to be implemented in the Strategic Growth Areas.

- Children, age twelve and under continued to ride transit for free.
- In the 2024 capital budget, Council allocated \$494,089 for the Climate Change Reserve.

Council also initiated a number of new climate actions:

- endorsed the Public Works Small-engine Equipment Electrification Pilot and the electrification of Zambonis in the City's arenas.
- accepted the recommendations of the Residential Parking Standards Review, which included lowering minimum off-street parking requirements for most residences and allowing developers to further reduce off street parking requirements by paying in-lieu fees to the City, and/or by providing bicycle parking or parking for a car or bike share program.
- accepted the Cycling Master Plan, which calls for a significant expansion of the City's cycle path network over the next 20 years.
- After voting to freeze transit funding early in 2023, and facing the possibility of having to make cuts to service, Council voted to create a Transit Liaison Committee. In September 2023, municipal staff presented Council with recommendations based on the deliberations of the Committee. These were accepted by Council, who agreed to hire four full time drivers (the Transit Liaison Committee had suggested eight) to increase service frequency to thirty minutes on weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m., to add two on-street supervisors, to bring back paper transit maps, and to otherwise improve the communication of transit information.
- endorsed a utility scale battery storage project proposed for Trent University.

The Limits of Climate Action by the Present Council

The limits of Council's willingness to act on climate, or to take the climate into considerations when making decisions, has also been evident:

- On June 12, 2023, Council received the Community Sector Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory and Update. The report stated that the city is very unlikely to reach its target of a 45% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030, and is likely at best to achieve a 14% reduction. The report was accompanied by recommendations from the Peterborough Environmental Advisory committee that:
 - The City pursue a more robust communications strategy to increase public engagement and encourage action, and that it "demonstrate leadership" through its own initiatives.
 - Council receive a detailed briefing on the contents of the GHG Emissions report and reaffirm its commitment to the Climate Change Emergency Declaration.
 - The City build coalitions with other municipalities and organizations to make delegations to, and undertake targeted advocacy with other levels of government to support meeting climate targets.

Council received the report for information without adopting any of the PEAC recommendations.
- On June 19, 2023, Council voted to fund a feasibility study for a Major Sport and Event Centre, to be located downtown. Though Councillor Parnell suggested that a climate lens be applied to the new complex, no motion was made to require the study to include a climate lens. Also, it was clear that Councillor Parnell's suggestion was concerned only with the proposed building's design (she urged that it be built to a LEED standard) and not to the larger questions of whether the building should be located downtown, or whether it should be built at all.
- On October 30, 2023, Council received the Residential Parking Standards Review. The report recommended various measures for reducing minimum off-street parking requirements for new developments, a worthy goal. An early draft of the report recommended requirements for providing

electric vehicle charging infrastructure in new developments, but this was dropped from the final report at the request of developers. Councillor Lachica expressed disappointment at this, but no motion was made to put the EV charging infrastructure requirements back into the report, and Council accepted the recommendations of the report as written, without amendment.

- On December 4, 2023, Council voted to accept Mixed Use Corridor Urban Design Guidelines only after inserting an amendment underlining their status as ‘guidelines’ and not ‘requirements’. During discussions of the ‘guidelines’, Councillors Duguay and Haacke reiterated their concern that the guidelines never become ‘rules,’ ‘standards,’ or ‘requirements’.
- Meeting as the General Committee, Council voted on December 4, 2023 to approve the purchase of a heavy-duty electric wastewater truck, at the cost of \$604,000, as recommended by staff. Michael Papadacos, Interim Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services, in explaining the reasons for the recommendation, stated that the electric truck was available for immediate delivery, whereas the wait time for a diesel vehicle was 14-16 months. (This is the result of California regulations which require manufacturers to maintain an inventory of electric vehicles.) Mr. Papadacos also stated that a high-speed charging station equipped with two charging ports would be included in the price of the truck, and that this could be used for other electric vehicles. He also stated that City staff looked forward to having this truck as a ‘pilot’ for possible further purchases of EVs. At its December 11, 2023 meeting, Council reversed its decision to purchase the truck. It is very clear that they were responding to complaints sent to them by constituents about the expense which the purchase entailed. Councillor Riel, in explaining his vote against the purchase said that he did not see why Peterborough should be the “spearhead” or “standard bearer” in the response to climate change. In his attack on the proposed purchase, Councillor Haacke said that he had not voted to declare a Climate Emergency [he was not on Council at the time].
 - The vote on the truck purchase was as follows: in favour: Councillors Duguay, Crowley, Bierk, and Lachica; opposed: Councillors Riel, Haacke, Beamer, Vassiliadis, and the Mayor; absent: Councillor Baldwin.
- Also at the December 11 Council meeting, a motion was made by Councillor Lachica that resurfacing work along Parkhill Road between Wallis Drive and Medical Drive be postponed until City staff are able to incorporate design changes, recommended in the Cycling Master Plan, to make the roadway safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Council voted down the motion, with only Councillors Lachica and Bierk in favour.

Conclusions

The Record Overall

Past and present City Councils should be credited with taking significant action in response to global warming, climate change and renewable energy generation. It is of particular importance to recognize that Council's have:

- acknowledged that climate change is real, that it is caused by human activities, that it is a threat to the wellbeing of humans and of nature, and that massive and rapid reductions in carbon emissions are required if catastrophe is to be prevented.
- established targets for GHG emission reductions, along with a system for tracking and reporting on progress toward meeting those goals.
- established stable funding for climate change initiatives through the Climate Change Reserve.
- deployed various energy-saving technologies in municipal facilities.
- through City of Peterborough Holdings Inc., expanded renewable electricity generation in the city. The city-owned CPHI now has a capacity of 48.3 MW, from water and solar power, enough to meet roughly half of Peterborough's residential electricity requirements. CPHI is looking forward to further investments in clean energy generation and energy storage.
- initiated studies of how to further reduce Corporate and Community emissions.
- updated the Official Plan, which, by calling for the creation of walkable, cyclable, transit-friendly "complete communities," looks toward a future in which the city will be less dependent on private automobiles and have fewer GHG emissions from transportation. The Official Plan has been supported and elaborated upon by the Central Area Design Guidelines, The Mixed-Use Corridor Urban Design Guidelines, the Transportation Master Plan, and the Cycling Master Plan.

However, it should also be acknowledged that the efforts of past councils and of the present council have not been sufficient to achieve the emission reduction targets which were set at the time of the Climate Emergency Declaration. Undeniably, these targets were ambitious, but they were not set arbitrarily. They align with Canada's national GHG emission reduction targets, and with the level of GHG reductions which must be achieved globally if the worst effects of climate change are to be averted. The commitments made at the time of the Climate Emergency Declaration should be regarded as the Peterborough's "fair share" of the struggle against climate change. Failure to meet emission reduction targets should be seen as the serious matter which it is.

It must also be acknowledged that neither past councils, nor the current council, have done all that might be done to combat global warming. Broadly speaking, they have fallen short in several areas:

- **Public engagement** – Council has conscientiously consulted the community on various occasions, but it has made little effort to lead it. Far more could be done to educate the public on the reality of climate change and what must be done by governments at all levels, by businesses, and by citizens, to address the climate change crisis.
- **Planning** – For decades, most of Peterborough's growth has taken the form of low-density single use subdivision developments on the city's periphery, with poor accommodation for active transportation and transit. Recently approved planning documents point in a more environmentally responsible direction, and a few developments have incorporated improvements, but most development continues to be on the traditional low-density subdivision model.
- **Electrification** – The city has done some good work in the area of energy conservation, but has not, so far, moved decisively to electrify its vehicle fleet or its building inventory. Money spent on the

Alternative Fuels Study would arguably have been much better spent on actually purchasing electric vehicles on a pilot project basis. Valuable time has been lost. The new arena complex at Morrow Park, which incorporates some excellent energy conservation measures, will be heated primarily by a gas boiler. A ground source heat pump, the best alternative technology, was not incorporated into the design. From the day it begins operation, the complex will be a major emitter of CO2.

- **The Climate Lens** – In the Climate Emergency Declaration of September 23, 2019, Council directed staff to work with the Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee to “report on the opportunities to” among other items “incorporate a climate change lens into all city actions and policies recognizing the need to achieve a target of 45% emission reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050.” As of now, more than four years after the Declaration, the City still has no formal climate lens mechanism. Decisions are being made, about dozens of matters, great and small, and there is no arrangement for Council even to be made aware of what effect their decisions might have on Peterborough’s ability to meet its climate objectives. Other cities have such climate lenses, and even carbon budgets, but Peterborough, to date, has neither.

The Record of the present Council

Council has shown that it is aware of the threat posed by climate change, and is committed to responding to that threat. This is particularly evident in that since assuming office, it has:

- Maintained funding for climate change action.
- Continued with several important studies initiated by previous councils, and set in motion the process for developing CCAP 2.0.
- Continued with the HEEP application, which could see significant funds made available for home energy retrofits.
- Provided support for transit.
- Adopted the recommendations of various planning studies which should support the Official Plan objective of walkable, cyclable, transit friendly “complete communities”.

However, the Council which took office in November of 2022 has, as a group, has moved cautiously on the “climate” file. They’ve continued with the policies put in place by the previous council, but they have not accelerated climate action to any perceptible degree.

The present Council has made very few major or decisive decisions with respect to climate. Their failure to act even when faced with a challenge has been notable. After the Corporate Emissions Update and the Community Emissions update both indicated that the city would fail to meet its emission reduction targets, the Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee, members of the community, City staff, and even some individual councillors, suggested actions which would move city closer to meeting its targets, but not one of these suggestions was acted upon, or even put before Council in the form of a motion.

Also worthy of note has been this Council’s strong preference for setting only voluntary guidelines, rather than compulsory standards, for developers. In the case of both the Mixed-Use Corridor Urban Design Guidelines and the Residential Parking Study, it turned decisively away from any attempt at regulation, in favour of leaving decisions related to climate, to the greatest possible degree, in the hands of property developers.

At its last session of 2023, Council did move decisively on the climate front, but not in a good way. The initial decision to buy a heavy-duty electric truck was entirely sound. The reversal of that decision came about because Councillors were overawed by the highly emotional but ill-informed reaction of some

residents. It was very unfortunate. The much less noticed decision to proceed with resurfacing a section of Parkhill Road without incorporating recommended measures to support active transportation and enhance the safety of the roadway for pedestrians and cyclists was also very unfortunate.

This report has not set out to assess the record of individual councillors on climate change action, and for the most part has avoided comment on this. It should be said however that the votes of this council, to date, suggest that both their views on climate change, and their willingness to act, fall along a broad spectrum. Residents who are concerned about the climate are strongly advised to follow proceedings at city hall and make their municipal representatives aware of their views.

Recommendations

For Our Grandchildren recommends the following actions that, at a minimum, Council should take within their current term of office to more effectively address the threat of global warming:

1. Create an effective climate lens to report the climate implications of all Council decisions. This should, ideally, be linked to a carbon budget.
2. Since only 5% of GHG emissions come from municipal government activities, implement an effective public education/awareness campaign to encourage citizens and businesses to reduce the remaining 95%.
3. Complete the development of the **Home Energy Efficiency Plan** and effectively promote it.
4. Ensure that the Official Plan and supporting plans guide the city's development toward a greener future.
5. Ensure that new road construction and reconstruction include the active transportation elements identified in the Transportation and Cycling master plans.
6. Adopt **Green Development Standards** to require builders to adopt minimum sustainability measures. One example is to require new and renovated buildings (from single family homes to apartment buildings) to incorporate the necessary power and at least the roughed in infrastructure to support home-based electric vehicle charging.
7. Increase the City's investment in public electric vehicle charging infrastructure and locate charging stations where they will be most effectively used.
8. Begin to electrify the municipal vehicle fleet.
9. Set the highest possible energy efficiency standard for the construction and operation of new municipal facilities.
10. Retrofit existing buildings to significantly reduce emissions toward meeting the goal of net zero emissions by 2050.