

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Planning and Economic Development
March 12, 2020

Joint Report of the Commissioner of Environmental Services
and
Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

Draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan

1. Recommendation

The Regional Clerk circulate this report and the draft Climate Change Action Plan to Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Lake Simcoe and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and the local municipalities with a request that comments be provided by June 30, 2020.

2. Summary

This report presents the draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan (Action Plan) provided in Attachment 1 and outlines next steps.

Key Points:

- In 2017, York Region Council endorsed development of a Climate Change Action Plan to coordinate and align efforts to address climate change
- Internal and external stakeholders were engaged to help develop the draft Action Plan
- The draft Action Plan identifies corporate and community actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to impacts of climate change
- Staff will undertake public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Action Plan
- Staff will report back to Council in early 2021 with a final Action Plan

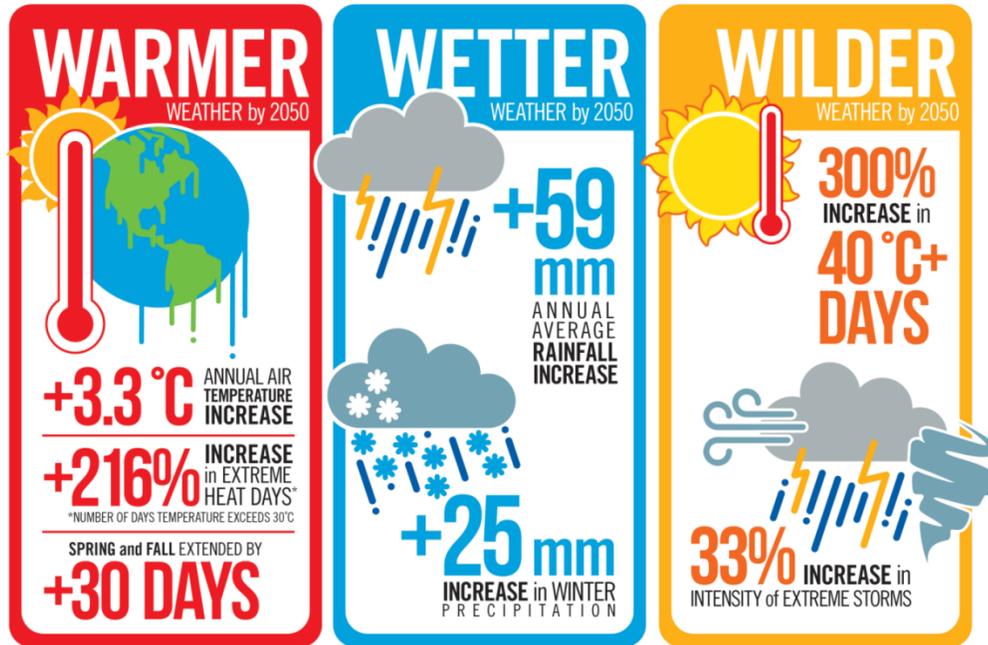
3. Background

York Region is experiencing impacts of climate change

Impacts of a changing climate result in winter getting shorter, annual average temperatures growing warmer and an increasing number of extreme weather events, as shown in Figure 1. Regional climate projections indicate these trends will continue to increase over time.

Communities in York Region will likely continue to experience financial impacts and service disruptions resulting from intense storms, heat waves and flooding.

Figure 1
Future Climate Projections for York Region



Source: Ontario Climate Consortium

Public awareness of cause and effect of climate change has increased

Climate change is a complex issue, with no single entity directly responsible for causing it or fixing it. Addressing climate change requires collective effort and innovation at multiple levels. Increasingly, the public is asking governments to issue 'climate emergencies' to drive local action. Aurora, King, Newmarket and Vaughan Councils have declared climate emergencies indicating the importance of taking action to address climate change in York Region. Development of the Action Plan will clearly identify York Region's commitment and leadership to address climate change.

Council's commitment to address climate change is well established

York Region Council has demonstrated commitment to address Climate Change through endorsement of the Sustainability Strategy (2007), Corporate Clean Air Strategy (2008) and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2010). Council's commitment to address climate change is identified in Vision 2051 and the York Region Official Plan, 2010 (ROP). In 2016, this commitment was reaffirmed through Council's endorsement of the Energy and Conservation Demand Management Plan Update that sets corporate greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to 2051.

A comprehensive and integrated approach will align efforts to address climate change

In [November 2017](#), Council endorsed development of an Action Plan recognizing the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to address climate change. The draft Action Plan aligns action required to address climate change including meeting legislative and regulatory mandates, delivering on corporate strategic priorities and demonstrating leadership.

An Internal Climate Change Working Group was created to bring together staff from across all departments to provide strategic direction on development of the Action Plan. Through the Joint Municipal Climate Change Working Group, local municipal staff provided input and identified opportunities for collaborative action to address climate change.

A jurisdictional scan and best practice review was undertaken to support development of the draft Action Plan to help identify innovative and regionally-relevant initiatives. Development of the draft Action Plan was also informed by consultation with community stakeholders and youth. A detailed list of research and consultation activities is included in Attachment 1.

4. Analysis

The draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan identifies how our communities can mitigate and adapt to effects of climate change

Addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation simultaneously results in synergies that support cost effective implementation and long term resiliency of communities. This approach is emerging as a best practice among government bodies to drive more comprehensive outcomes given the complex nature of taking action to address climate change. To leverage these opportunities, the draft Action Plan is structured to address four components, including:

- Corporate Mitigation
- Corporate Adaptation
- Community Mitigation
- Community Adaptation

The draft Action Plan (Attachment 1) is founded on the goal that York Region communities will continue to thrive under changing climate conditions. To achieve this goal, the Action Plan proposes two key outcomes:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions with a long term goal of becoming a net-zero Region by 2050 (climate mitigation)
- Increasing resilience and capacity of the Region to withstand and respond to current and future climate change impacts (climate adaptation)

Priority Actions have been identified to focus efforts on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change

To achieve the expressed outcomes, actions have been organized into three priority areas: Resilient Communities and Infrastructure, Low Carbon Living and Supporting an Equitable Transition. Key actions in the draft Action Plan include:

- Undertaking vulnerability and risk assessments on all Regional infrastructure, systems and assets using a common methodology
- Prioritizing infrastructure and asset repairs in climate vulnerable areas
- Establishing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets
- Coordinating strategies York Region and its partners can undertake to increase community resilience and emergency preparedness
- Applying an equity lens to prioritizing and supporting climate mitigation and adaptation actions. Essentially this means prioritizing and balancing actions to reduce the most pressing vulnerabilities while recognizing climate change impacts can magnify other existing inequalities.
- Developing communication and education strategies on the impacts of climate, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resiliency

The draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan builds on existing efforts to address climate change already underway

Leveraging climate-related initiatives that York Region, local municipalities and other stakeholders are already undertaking is essential to focus efforts. The draft Action Plan builds on work and key policies guiding climate-related action aligned with York Region's core service areas.

The Growth Plan 2019 requires Official Plans to include policies that address climate mitigation and adaptation to make communities more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate. The draft Action Plan is being developed in alignment with Municipal Comprehensive Review and will inform Official Plan policy development.

In addition to the draft Action Plan, a Community Energy and Emissions Plan is also under development and will address community energy use and greenhouse gas emissions across a broad range of sectors. Community actions developed through the Community Energy and Emissions Plan will contribute toward the goal and outcomes identified in the York Region Energy Conservation Demand Management Plan and York Region Climate Change Action Plan.

Developing and implementing community action requires governance to drive engagement and partnerships

The draft Action Plan identifies community actions that will require an internal governance structure to drive engagement and partnership across multiple disciplines and jurisdictions. A clear definition of roles and responsibilities will be further explored through development of an Implementation Plan and as projects move forward. As discovered through development of the draft Action Plan development, there are multiple opportunities to leverage existing partnerships to undertake community-scale climate analysis, coordinate consistent climate action at the local municipal level and encourage public participation.

Staff will develop an Implementation Plan to track progress on implementation of the Action Plan. Given the unique combination of corporate and community actions, additional discussion is required to identify key performance indicators and a regular monitoring and reporting schedule for the Action Plan. The implementation plan will also have to identify how actions are prioritized, resourced and coordinated.

A Final York Region Climate Change Action Plan will be presented to Council following public consultation

Consultation on the draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan is proposed to confirm actions, partnerships and implementation. To the extent feasible, consultation efforts will be aligned with planned engagement opportunities such as those occurring through the Municipal Comprehensive Review and Official Plan Update. Subject to any refinements made through consultation, a final version of the Action Plan, including an implementation and monitoring plan will be presented to Council early 2021.

Initiative supports strategic goals of Vision 2051 and Strategic Plan

Development of the draft Action Plan supports the Living Sustainably and Open and Responsive Governance goal areas of Vision 2051. The draft Action Plan is also aligned with Strategic Plan Priority to Build Sustainable Communities and Protect the Environment. The draft Action Plan will also support implementation of the Healthy Communities policies in the ROP.

5. Financial

Investing in climate change action has an anticipated return on investment

The National Round Table on Environment and Economy estimates that, at a national level, the economic costs of failing to address climate change risks could be between \$21 and \$43 billion a year by 2050. Building on existing actions and making new investments to give York Region greater resiliency will help minimize high costs and severe impacts of inaction.

To the extent possible, short term corporate actions build or incrementally improve upon work already underway. Like the Corporate Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan, this Plan builds on programs across departments. For longer term actions, lead

departments will develop detailed work plans and business cases to support additional resources or future budget requests, if required.

York Region has been successful in obtaining funding to support climate action from other levels of government. In 2019, York Region was awarded over \$66 million in Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation funding through Infrastructure Canada for shovel ready projects that help reduce wastewater failures due to flooding and reduce greenhouse gas through increased forest and street tree cover. It is anticipated that developing the Action Plan will better position the Region to leverage additional funding opportunities.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities are already taking action to address climate change including corporate and community energy plans, sustainability and environmental strategies, vulnerability assessments and climate adaptation action plans. In some cases, local municipalities have dedicated staff offering a corporate focus on these efforts.

To promote alignment, York Region established the Joint Municipal Climate Change Working Group to work collaboratively with our local municipal partners on addressing climate change. This Working Group was used to seek local municipal input into development of the draft Action Plan.

The draft Action Plan identifies opportunities for collaborative action to address climate change by recognizing and building on local municipal efforts. Local municipalities can use York Region's Climate Change Action Plan as a starting point from which to build more locally-specific plans. The Working Group will continue to provide local municipal perspective on implementation of the Action Plan.

7. Conclusion

York Region is already experiencing a changing climate. Increasingly, the work York Region undertakes will need to consider climate change. The draft Action Plan identifies priority actions that leverage existing efforts already underway and promote collective action with internal and external partners. York Region staff propose to undertake public and stakeholder consultation on this draft Action Plan. A final Action Plan informed by feedback received and including an implementation and monitoring plan will be presented to Council in early 2021.

For more information on this report, please contact Teresa Cline, Program Manager, Climate Change at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71591. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Attachment (1)
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