

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Planning and Economic Development
September 8, 2022

Joint Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner
and
Commissioner of Public Works

York Region Climate Change Action Plan

1. Recommendations

1. Council approve the 2022 York Region Climate Change Action Plan (Attachment 1)
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report and the Climate Change Action Plan to the Clerks of the local municipalities, Lake Simcoe and Toronto and Region Conservation Authorities, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks

2. Summary

This report requests Council approval of the 2022 York Region Climate Change Action Plan (Action Plan) provided in Attachment 1, which sets the path for both mitigation (reduced emissions) and adaptation (preparing for our future climate). The Action Plan builds on current programs and activities to increase resiliency in anticipation of ongoing effects of climate change on York Region services, businesses, and the community.

Key Points:

- In March 2020, the draft Action Plan was presented to Council and distributed to stakeholders, Indigenous communities and partners for review. Comments received were considered and informed development of the final Action Plan
- Public, Indigenous communities and stakeholder consultation was completed on the draft Action Plan. There was strong support for the approach and actions identified in the draft Action Plan. Stakeholders identified that York Region has a well positioned ability to support and influence climate change action in the community
- The Region's commitment to a net-zero Region by 2050 as established in the York Region Official Plan (ROP) and Action Plan aligns with the federal *Canadian Net-zero Emissions Accountability Act* (Bill C-12), provincial legislation including the *Electricity Act* and *Planning Act* and is consistent with local municipal community energy planning

- The Action Plan identifies 20 actions to advance work throughout York Region in both corporate and community activities to achieve the following outcomes:
 - Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions with the long-term goal of becoming a net-zero Region by 2050
 - Increase resiliency and capacity of the Region to withstand and respond to current and future climate events
- Implementation tasks for the next five years have been included in the Action Plan focussing on important tasks to be initiated and activities underway through existing programs and partnerships
- Progress on the Action Plan will be reported on and communicated regularly through an Environmental, Social and Governance Framework and related initiatives

3. Background

Action Plan builds on Council commitment to address climate change

In [November 2017](#), Council approved development of an Action Plan, recognizing the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to address climate change. A draft Action Plan was presented to Council in [March 2020](#) with the following next steps: public, Indigenous communities and stakeholder engagement, implementation steps and governance review.

Residents are moderately or very concerned about climate change (87% of public survey respondents)

Results of Climate Change Action Plan engagement survey results show that 87% of just over 400 respondents are very concerned about climate change and 64% of respondents are strongly motivated to take action on climate change and concern for future generations is the top motivator (80% of public survey respondents). This is consistent with findings from the Leger survey published by The Canadian Press in which 70% of Canadians indicated that they are either very stressed or concerned about climate change. This is an indicator that taking action to address and prepare for climate change is important to our community and beyond.

Investing in climate change adaptation will minimize risk and severity of future climate related damages

According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC), in 2021 severe weather caused \$2.1 billion in insured damage in Canada compared to an average of \$422 million per year from 1983 to 2008 and \$1.8 billion between 2009 and 2017. IBC data indicated that in July and September 2021 costs related to severe weather events in Ontario ranked amongst the highest in the country.

The National Round Table on Environment and Economy estimates that, at a national level, economic costs of failing to address climate change risks could be between \$21 billion and \$43 billion a year by 2050.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Insurance Bureau of Canada released the [Investing in Canada's Future: The Cost of Climate Adaptation at the Local Level](#) report in 2020. Research studies from this report showed investments in infrastructure resiliency can have a return on investment of \$6 in future averted losses for every \$1 spent proactively. Investments in adaptation to a changing climate and risk mitigation measures, including public infrastructure will be important to minimizing future damages.

Building on existing actions and making new investments to give York Region greater resiliency will help reduce future recovery costs and severity of impacts. Adaptation action is critical to our community's resiliency to climate change.

Action Plan aligns with federal and provincial greenhouse gas emission targets and climate change adaptation legislative requirements

At the Federal level, the *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act* became law on June 29, 2021, and it includes a target for net-zero emissions by 2050 with a framework of accountability and transparency. Subsequently, as required by the Act, the [2030 Emissions Reduction Plan](#) was released in March 2022.

At the Provincial level, on November 29, 2018, the province released the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan that considers provincial specific priorities, challenges and opportunities, and commits to reducing provincial emissions to 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. Provincial land-use planning legislation and policy requires minimizing negative impacts to air quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the impacts of a changing climate. Municipalities are also required to address climate mitigation and adaptation opportunities through asset management planning. More information on climate change related legislation can be found in Attachment 2.

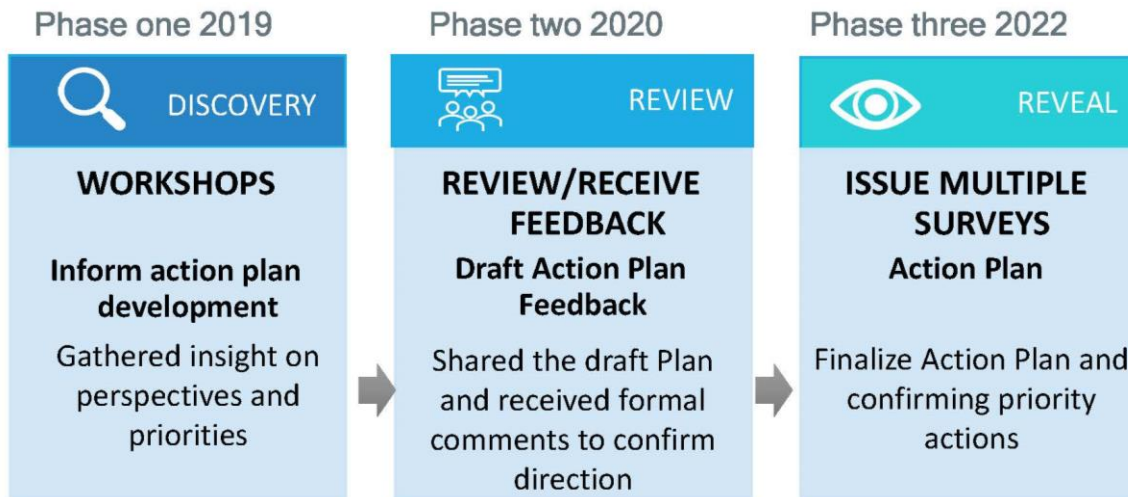
In alignment with federal and provincial direction, the York Region Official Plan and Climate Change Action Plan include the community target of net-zero emissions by 2050 aligning with senior government targets. Council has also recently approved alignment of the Region's long-term corporate greenhouse gas emissions target with the federal 2050 net-zero emissions target through the [2021 Corporate Energy Report](#).

Consultation and engagement on draft Climate Change Action Plan confirmed existing and planned actions are appropriate

Engagement has been important in the development and review of the Action Plan and took place in three phases (discovery, review and reveal) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Climate Change Action Plan Engagement Milestones



Phase one, discovery, was critical to developing the Action Plan and confirming corporate and community action underway. This included a series of workshops with York Region staff, local municipal staff and community stakeholders. Insights from these sessions combined with research and jurisdictional scans were reviewed in consultation with local municipal staff resulting in the draft Action Plan.

Through Phase two formal comments on the draft Action Plan were received from local municipalities, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and community stakeholders. Stakeholders shared their interest in contributing to specific climate action such as benchmarking for building energy and water performance, identifying flood risk to infrastructure, and coordinating circular economy initiatives. Comments support including further details on implementation in the Action Plan.

Staff also engaged with 13 Indigenous communities through review of the Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan and Water and Wastewater Master Plan. Through these conversations, Indigenous communities expressed concern about the impacts climate change will continue to have on natural systems, Indigenous communities and traditional ways of life. The Action Plan acknowledges that further dialogue with Indigenous communities on implementation will be required.

Phase three shared the proposed final plan and sought feedback through surveys to community stakeholders, public and Indigenous communities. Respondents were asked to identify which actions in each of the three priority areas (Resilient Communities and Infrastructure, Low Carbon Living, Supporting an Equitable Transition) were most important.

Details of the engagement results can be found on York.ca. Survey results top priorities in each priority area are shown below:

- Resilient Communities:
 - Integrate climate change considerations into existing and new municipal planning (ROP) and development tools

- Assess the role natural systems play in mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Low Carbon Living:
 - Support waste prevention and circular economy practices
 - Establish community-wide greenhouse gas emission reduction targets
- Supporting an Equitable Transition:
 - Leverage existing programs to support the transition to a low-carbon economy
 - Include the most severe and likely climate-related risks in enterprise risk management practice
 - Integrate future climate information and adaptation planning into York Region's Emergency Preparedness Plans and Business Continuity Plans

Results aligned well with work currently underway in York Region, indicating that decision making related to climate change aligns with community priorities.

4. Analysis

York Region's Climate Change Action Plan addresses mitigation and adaptation from corporate and community perspectives

Mitigation and adaptation are two types of actions used to address climate change.

- **Mitigation** is taking action to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.
- **Adaptation** is taking action to minimize or avoid the negative impacts of a changing climate.

Addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation simultaneously results in synergies that support cost effective implementation and long-term resiliency of communities. This approach is considered a best practice to drive comprehensive outcomes given the complex and evolving nature of climate change. The Action Plan addresses mitigation and adaptation from corporate and community perspectives, as shown in Table 1. While the Region has direct control of the corporate actions, it is well positioned to partner, support and influence climate change action in the community.

Table 1
Action Plan Components

	Mitigation	Adaptation
Corporate	Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan	Corporate Risk Assessments, Asset Management Plans, and Infrastructure Design
Community	Region-wide Community Energy Plan	Resilient food system, Emergency preparedness, Low-carbon economy, Health Vulnerability Assessments

Action Plan connects efforts throughout the community and identifies the Region’s role and potential partnerships

Developing and implementing actions requires engagement and partnership with the community and clear definition of roles and responsibilities. York Region is well positioned to influence climate change action at the community scale and align efforts through partnership. The Action Plan (Attachment 1) aims to achieve the following 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 York Region to withstand and respond to current and future climate change impacts (climate adaptation)

To achieve these outcomes, 20 actions have been organized into three priority areas:

1. Resilient Communities and Infrastructure (seven actions)
2. Low Carbon Living (five actions)
3. Supporting an Equitable Transition (eight actions)

A comprehensive and integrated York Region Climate Change Action Plan ensures a consistent approach across the corporation and helps drive coordinated community action

Many of York Region’s corporate and departmental strategies and plans address elements of climate change. Alignment will be achieved by applying a climate change lens as these plans and programs are reviewed and updated. Figure 2 describes the relationship between York Region’s plans and strategies that address climate change.

Figure 2
York Region Climate Change Plans and Strategies



York Region Climate Change Action Plan builds on efforts underway to address climate change

The Action Plan provides a holistic understanding of initiatives across the Region addressing climate change and leverages work underway by the Region, local municipalities and other stakeholders. It advances existing work and links to programs and policies which address climate change to bring clarity on where a climate change lens has already been applied and places in which it should be applied. The 20 actions build on existing partnerships, provide guidance and identifies new partnership opportunities to support community actions.

Mitigation efforts have been initiated through initiatives such as the Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan, Greening Strategy, SM4ART Living Plan, York Official Plan policies to support complete communities and the circular economy. York Region is embracing collaborative initiatives such as road right-of-way pollinator gardens, designed to support pollinators and at the same time reduce maintenance and emissions.

Adaptation measures underway include incorporating a climate lens into existing risk identification and asset management programs, infrastructure vulnerability research, health

vulnerability assessment, emergency preparedness, along with promoting resilient food systems and a low-carbon economy.

Coordination of climate change goals and targets have been established in the Regional Official Plan aligned with Vision and the Strategic Plan. The Action Plan sets out the coordinated path forward to achieve mitigation and adaptation actions. The Region's role to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change will involve all departments and a coordinated effort between Finance, Planning and Economic Development and Public Works as outlined below:

- Finance – **coordinating Climate Actions** and reporting on an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework as introduced on April 7, 2022, with the tabling of the federal government budget
- Planning and Economic Development - **leading Community Actions** including implementation of York Region Official Plan policy, community energy planning, sustainable development programs and coordination of the Local Municipal Climate Change Working Group
- Public Works – **leading Corporate Actions** including reporting for corporate energy use, Energy Conservation and Demand Management progress and public works climate change initiatives

Developing and implementing actions at the community level requires engagement and partnerships from all levels of government and community

The Action Plan identifies York Region's role which includes leveraging existing and developing new partnerships to conduct community-scale climate analysis, coordinate consistent climate action, and encourage and support actions of other partners and Indigenous communities.

Development of a Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP), currently underway, will address community energy use and greenhouse gas emissions across a broad range of sectors (local businesses, agricultural community, school boards, and residential). The CEEP will set interim greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to meet the long-term goal of net-zero by 2050 and identify further opportunities for partnership.

York Region continues to seek partnerships in advocating for senior government legislation, promoting municipal and non-government agency initiatives and programs, as well as supporting technology and innovation.

Action Plan progress will be reported through existing processes and reviewed in more detail during every term of Council

The Action Plan has been developed as a living document. Although the impacts of climate change are already being felt, its long-term consequences continue to evolve and the effects of mitigation efforts are still uncertain. Agility and flexibility will be required given the legislative context and as the climate landscape continues to evolve. An agile approach will allow the Region to fine-tune identified actions and add new ones to take advantage of

opportunities, adapt to unexpected events and trends, and learn from other leading jurisdictions.

Progress will be reported through existing mechanisms including reports on waste, corporate energy, asset management and the Strategic Plan. A comprehensive Action Plan progress update will be brought during each term of Council. As a living document, the Action Plan will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, be revised as needed, and ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan.

Climate Change Action Plan aligns with Vision and the Strategic Plan supporting each Area of Focus

The Action Plan aligns with all four Areas of Focus identified in Vision and the Strategic Plan (Economic Vitality, Healthy Communities, Sustainable Environment and Good Government). Action Plan implementation will contribute to the Community Indicators relating to emission reduction and a reduction in personal vehicle use from the Sustainable Environment focus area.

5. Financial

Funding opportunities with Federal and Provincial agencies support implementation of the Action Plan

York Region has been successful in obtaining funding to support climate change action from other levels of government. York Region has been awarded over \$100 million in Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation funding through Infrastructure Canada for shovel-ready projects that help reduce wastewater failures due to flooding, improve groundwater wells for better resiliency and reduce greenhouse gas through increased forest and street tree cover. Through the Provincial Clean Water and Wastewater fund the Region was able to leverage \$34.4 million of funds since 2018 supporting infrastructure research and improvements for resiliency. Having an Action Plan in place will better leverage additional funding opportunities. Advocating for further Federal and Provincial funding support will be essential to help fund implementation of this Action Plan.

Financial Implications will be considered through Regional Environmental, Social and Governance Framework

This Action Plan leverages existing Council approved investments, work and partnerships. It provides a transparent road map to ensure collaboration and alignment with funded Strategic Plan priorities. While this Action Plan is intended to anticipate and minimize risk through actions, unanticipated events are likely to have a financial impact. Advancing the Region's Environmental, Social and Governance Framework will continue including consideration of financial implications associated with addressing climate change impacts.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities are taking action to address climate change. The Action Plan identifies opportunities for collaborative action to address climate change by recognizing, aligning with, and building on local municipal efforts. To ensure alignment, York Region established the Joint Municipal Climate Change Working Group to work collaboratively with our local municipal partners in addressing climate change. Local municipalities can use the Action Plan as a starting point from which to build more locally specific plans. The Working Group continues to provide local municipal perspective on implementation of the Action Plan.

Town of Aurora, Township of King, Town of Newmarket and City of Vaughan have declared a climate change state of emergency. All local municipalities are 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. Approved local municipal strategies, including any emission reduction targets, are summarized in Attachment 3 of the Action Plan.

7. Conclusion

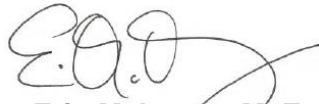
As being observed globally, York Region is experiencing an unpredictable and changing climate with the occurrence of extreme weather annually within and near our community. Services the Region provides are essential for the health and safety of the community and acting on key climate related initiatives will improve resiliency, minimizing impacts to service delivery and the community. Together, through consultation and engagement, the York Region Climate Change Action Plan has been developed with corporate and community actions designed to address both mitigation and adaptation. Approval of this Action Plan is a significant step demonstrating leadership and movement towards a more resilient York Region.

For more information on this report, please contact Teresa Cline, Manager Policy and Environment, Long Range Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71591 or Wendy Kemp, Director, Infrastructure Asset Management at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75141. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



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Attachments (3)
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