



## Recreation and Community Services Staff Report

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Report Title:	Staffing Request – Climate Action and Sustainability Co-ordinator
Report Number:	R10-2023
Author:	Ann McArthur
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Reviewed By:	Senior Management Team
Final Review:	Chief Administrative Officer

### Recommendation:

That the Council of the Township of Woolwich, considering Report R10-2023 respecting a staffing request:

1. Approve the hiring of a full-time Climate and Sustainability Co-ordinator
2. Approve the staff position being funded from the Climate Action/Green Infrastructure Reserve Fund in 2024 and 2025 with staff to report back during 2026 budget deliberations on future funding options.

### Background:

The Township has a long history of environmental stewardship. Various volunteer committees (*Township of Woolwich Environmental Enhancement Committee, Trees for Woolwich, Clean Waterways, Healthy Communities, Woolwich Trails group*) have done incredible work for years supported by the Township's Environmental Coordinator. Much of this work would not have occurred without dedicated volunteer groups that focus efforts on tree planting, greening/environmental initiatives, trail development and maintenance, and these efforts will continue.

Additionally, other strategies are in place that staff have accommodated within existing work plans and budgets such as energy efficient upgrades to facilities, LED streetlight replacements, and transitioning from gas powered vehicles and equipment to electric. There are several greening initiatives and policy work undertaken annually through various Committees such as TWEEC, the Township's internal Green Team and Woolwich Climate Action, and the Woolwich Environmental Advisory Committee (WEAC).

## **Sustainable Waterloo Region**

In 2018, as a next step, the Township became a member of Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR). SWR is a support organization that provides member municipalities and businesses with high level information and resources to support efforts to become economically resilient and sustainable corporations. Additionally, SWR provides a tool to measure baseline data and provides annual tracking of data on consumption. This membership while incredibly beneficial, does not provide sufficient resources to support policy development and implementation strategies. SWR provides support to the Township's internal staff Green Team. This has involved making scoped efforts to reduce our carbon footprint. However, in the absence of in-house expertise the Green Team has been unable to gravitate to other initiatives such as waste management reduction and water conservation efforts.

## **Climate Emergency**

On October 1, 2019, Woolwich Township Council along with the other (7) municipalities in Waterloo Region, passed the following recommendation: *"the Township of Woolwich does hereby declare a climate emergency with the directive to provide continued support to corporate and community climate action at the Township and work over time towards improved targets where possible."*

## **Comments:**

Staff are committed to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through all avenues available to us, including cost-effective projects and retrofits, green building development by-laws, procurement, asset renewal, policy implementation and sustainable operations.

Some strategies and plans currently in place to help make informed decisions, include:

- Elmira Green Infrastructure Report
- GHG Reduction Pathway Feasibility Study
- Environmental stewardship (Committee work)
- Asset renewal and energy efficiencies through operating and capital budgets
- Conservation Demand and Management Plan
- TransformWR Action Plan development

## **Climate Action Waterloo Region – TransformWR Action Plan**

On June 8, 2021, Woolwich Township Council endorsed the TransformWR Community Climate Action Strategy being Waterloo Region's community wide response to the global climate crisis. This action plan outlines our long-term strategy to achieve an 80% local GHG reduction target (based on 2010 levels) by 2050. Council also supported the ambitious and

aggressive ask by the regional 50 by 30 group to reduce our emissions by 50% by the year 2030.

The action plan proposes to transform our community, in the ways we move, the ways we build and operate our spaces, the ways we produce, consume and waste, and the ways we relate to one another. For each milestone, there is a set of strategies and action items identified and means to track progress. The document lays out a pathway for how our community will build upon its history of climate action and show leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions that lead to climate change.

We have a collaborative, regionally developed plan but face a significant gap in dedicated staff resources, with the required knowledge and expertise, for successful implementation of the plan or other sustainability initiatives.

There are 78 action items identified to transition to a low carbon community. Of those 78 actions, 45 are the responsibility of the Township to implement. All (7) municipalities in the Region have either endorsed or approved the action plan that work collectively to adapt to the changes already happening with a larger focus on strategies to eliminate or reduce the causes of climate change and reduce GHG emissions. Wilmot Council has previously approved the hiring of a climate action staff person however the position has not been filled yet.

If Council and the community wish to be leaders in the field of sustainability, bold and immediate action needs to happen to ensure that we are doing everything we can locally to meet these targets and do our part. Council and staff have been looking for opportunities to make real and impactful operational changes to mitigate the adverse effects of municipal operations on climate and emissions.

Staff recommend that Council approve the addition of this pivotal staff resource to drive the implementation of the TransformWR action plan. The initial year would be foundational in terms of building the annual business plan and implementation strategy. The position would assess the work currently being done and establish priorities for plan implementation over the next 5 years. Work would also include policies to ensure that sustainability is embedded in operations and capital programs for the long term.

Staff's intent is to report back on proposed timelines, deliverables, implementation costs, data measurement, and anticipated outcomes through the annual business plan and quarterly report.

The position would also play an important role in education/climate literacy for Council, staff, and the public. It is an opportunity to promote sustainability in the broader community through community outreach, education, and awareness of programs and grant funding available to both residents and business for building retrofits.

A few Council members and partner organizations have advocated for this new position to be aligned with the CAO's office which typically only has Directors as direct staff reports. After internal discussions, staff recommend that the position is best suited in the CAO's department to demonstrate the Township's commitment to climate action, to ensure the Township applies a broad perspective to operations and capital planning, and the portfolio receives the appropriate exposure and support to advance action items in each department. It will be important that all projects, staff reports, policies and initiatives make decisions acknowledging climate and environmental impacts.

It is important to note that the position will very much be guided by all departments jointly in developing the annual business plan and when establishing priorities. The position will support the workload of all departments and the internal Green Team with sustainability initiatives.

Without dedicated financial and staff resources, the Township is unable to implement the TransformWR action plan, is unable to meet both community and corporate expectations to achieve established GHG emission reduction targets and initiate real, significant changes to address climate change within our operations. Staff appreciates the need to balance fiscal accountability with climate action responsibility, and that taking action requires courageous decisions to ensure the Township is set up to be successful in achieving GHG emission reduction targets. Without additional resources, existing staff will need to scale back participation at various regional environmental tables with competing priorities and workload pressures required to support the existing annual workplan relating to trail development and maintenance, tree planting and support for various environmental committees.

Council has three options available to move forward with the TransformWR plan:

1. Fund the position from the general levy
2. Fund the position from the existing Climate Action/Green Infrastructure Reserve Fund
3. Continue with the slow and staged approach to implementation of the action outlined in the strategy based on limited staff and financial resources

### **Interdepartmental Impacts:**

This position will support all departments to successfully implement the TransformWR Plan and the (45) action items for Woolwich, and other corporate wide initiatives to meet established GHG emissions reductions previously endorsed by Council.

### **Financial Impacts:**

Staff recommend the position be funded from the Climate Action/Green Infrastructure Reserve Fund in 2024 and 2025. Staff will report back to Council through the 2026 budget deliberations on alternative funding options.

Additional budget funds will be required to implement programs and initiatives and will be included in future operating and capital budgets. Budget funds may also be available to access/match upper-level government grant funding to support mitigation plans and proposed programs such as RetrofitWR.

Based on comparable positions within the Township, staff recommend that the position be placed at Level 5 on the salary grid with anticipated annual staff salary costs of \$76,882 to \$96,103 (2024 \$'s) plus related payroll costs. Once approved, staff see the position starting in early January 2024 allowing time for recruitment, interviews and to accommodate the Christmas holiday.

### **Strategic Plan Impacts:**

The Township's continued advocacy for climate action and sustainability resources supports the Strategic Plan Focus Area of *Health Communities* by supporting sustainability of the natural environment and other resources, promotes and supports environmental stewardship efforts. Additional resources will evaluate the potential impacts and benefits of new green energy technology that provides value added benefits to the local economy while not detracting from quality of life. climate action promotes collaborative efforts regionally on water conservation and wastewater efficiency efforts.

The climate action and sustainability position supports the Focus Area: *Infrastructure Maintenance and Transportation Planning* by optimizing the use of municipal Infrastructure, to manage and maintain all municipal infrastructure with an emphasis on continuous improvement and greater efficiencies.

It also encourages the adoption of a fiscally responsible long-term Capital Plan that deals with the growing infrastructure deficit, while advocating for increased funding from senior levels of government.

### **Conclusion:**

Staff recommend that the only path forward to ensure the Township can advance any initiatives of the TransformWR action plan, and significantly reduce GHG emissions in municipal operations, facilities, and infrastructure to meet established reduction targets by 2030 is through additional dedicated staff resources with expertise in sustainability and climate action.

### **Attachments:**

Appendix A – TransformWR action items – 45 for Townships

Appendix B – Staff Justification Form

Appendix C – Letter of Support from WEAC

Appendix D - WEAC Recommendations: Sustainability Role at Woolwich Township