

County Council adopts climate plan

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Dufferin County Council has adopted a climate action plan to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in the community by 2050.

A net-zero target is ambitious, reflecting not only the urgency of the climate crisis, but also Dufferin County's commitment to act as a leader on climate change in the community, said Dufferin Warden Darren White. This target means that by 2050 Dufferin County will have reduced community greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible while removing any unavoidable emissions from the atmosphere through natural or technological solutions.

Councillor members were given a presentation of the County's first climate action plan during their meeting last Thursday March 11, from Dufferin County manager of Climate and Energy, Sara Wicks.

Wicks, at the beginning of the presentation, noted the increased costs municipalities will see in the future with inaction toward the current climate crisis, including increased costs of maintenance and operation of roads and infrastructure, rising insurance premiums, self-insured liabilities, and increase in disaster response costs.

The cost of inaction is actually great than the investments required today, said Wicks.

Canada, along with 197 other countries in 2015, adopted the Paris Agreement, an international treaty on climate change. The goal of the Paris Agreement is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The federal government has committed to net-zero, meaning the economy emits either no greenhouse gas emissions or offsets the emissions, by 2050.

The Climate Action Plan presentation proposed a three-phase reduction timeline as a guide to the 2050 net-zero target. The plan is to see a 10 percent reduction below 2016 levels of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 2030, a 40 percent reduction by 2040, and 80 percent by 2050.

Wicks said Dufferin County's target for 2050 keeps it in line with other levels of government.

While the Climate Action Plan is helping create a strategy for Dufferin County and the local municipalities to reach greenhouse gas neutrality, it is also aiding to build resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

Dufferin County has seen about a one degree increase in the annual temperature since 1948, and current projections show the temperature trend will continue to rise.

Local climate projections show that Dufferin can expect to experience rising temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, and an increasing number of severe weather events, said Mono Mayor Laura Ryan, in a press release. This plan is a critical step in ensuring that Dufferin remains a healthy and thriving community for current and future generations to come.

The Climate Action Plan has six focus areas (on the move, in our buildings, for our land, planning our county, in our bins, and empowering our communities), with 34 actions to help mitigate or reduce local greenhouse gas emissions, and adapt to climate change.

In the presentation five priority actions were highlighted to be completed by 2025 based around energy efficiency and fuel switching, low-carbon transportation, green development standards and climate resiliency for natural and agricultural systems.

According to a press release from the County, residents can expect an "acceleration of initiatives" towards these priorities such as the installation of public electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, energy saving programs with the County and local utility companies, and enhancements to the natural environment.

Following the Climate Action Plan presentation Warden Darren White noted the ongoing debate towards the climate crisis.

"Take the words climate change out of the equation, those are things we should be doing anyway," said White. "They talk to food security, they talk to energy efficiency, protecting natural heritage features, protecting wetland, enhancing and restoring those. These are things we should be doing anyways, the fact that that is a big part of the fix for climate change is a secondary."

A corporate climate action plan will be developed later in the year.