

County releases first annual Climate Action Report Card

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

April is Earth Month and to mark the occasion, Dufferin County has released the first-ever annual Climate Action Report Card.

The report card was released by the County on April 14, and provides a progress update on the implementation of the Dufferin Climate Action Plan.

‘It’s really about keeping us accountable to what was promised in there because the plan was really what we heard from the community,’ said Sara Wicks, manager of climate and energy. ‘It’s a bit of a checkpoint for ourselves and a point of celebration to see how far we’ve actually come. Climate action can be a little bit invisible to people so it’s really marking our journey along the way.’

The Dufferin Climate Action Plan was developed by the County’s Climate and Energy Division, publicly known as Climate Action in Dufferin, and was officially adopted by Council in March of 2021. It’s the County’s first comprehensive strategy to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) by 2050, and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Using six focus areas, the Dufferin Climate Action Plan outlined 34 primary actions and 99 sub actions for the County to take to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality and community resilience.

The report card identified the status of each action and highlighted key initiatives from 2021.

While the report card showed a select few actions that had been deemed ‘completed’ or considered ‘ongoing’, majority of the actions fell within the categories of ‘delayed’ or ‘future plans’.

Speaking with the Free Press, Wicks said many of the projects listed as future actions were not scheduled to begin until this year and next year, and added they faced delays with COVID-19 as well as with staffing.

Wicks also noted that with it being the first year the report card has been published it’s too early to determine how on track the County is in the plan.

‘One year is not a lot of time and this last year has been about building things. I’m impressed with how much we were actually able to get out the door and I think that probably is a better question five years from now when we do an updated inventory,’ said Wicks.

A priority focus for Climate Action in Dufferin in 2021 was transportation, which according to the report makes up almost half of emissions in Dufferin County. A key initiative in addressing transportation emissions was the installation of 24 electric vehicle charging stations.

‘Although electric vehicles don’t make up a huge percentage of our car ownership, yet, it was a really great opportunity for us to show some leadership in the community and say ‘we’re an EV ready community’,’ said Wicks.

Other key initiatives Climate Action in Dufferin targeted in 2021 included completion of a feasibility study for a community deep energy retrofit financing program, activation of the Experimental Acres Farm pilot in partnership with Wellington County, 3,200 tonnes of organics composted through Dufferin Waste’s Green Bin program, and the launch of the Climate Hub and Climate Stories of Dufferin project.

For 2022 Climate Action in Dufferin will be focusing on initiatives connected to buildings, which is the county's second biggest GHG emission at 29 per cent.

?So many residents in Dufferin County have independent fuels, whether that's propane or furnace oil, and there's such a huge opportunity there to do some fuel switching and around efficacy in everybody's houses.?

Wicks also noted that they'll be working on further incorporating local residents into initiatives to help with community resiliency from climate change.

?One of the biggest things that people need to understand is that within their municipalities they have indirect control of about 50 per cent of emissions, so there's quite a bit that can be done at the local level,? said Wicks.

Residents can find out ways to take action against climate change through Climate Action in Dufferin's, Climate Hub.

?It breaks down whole sections on taking action and there are very simple things that can be done in there and how to level them up over time.?

The full Climate Action Report Card can be found on the Dufferin County website at www.dufferincounty.ca.