

**The Town of Saugeen Shores
Environmental Ad Hoc Committee Final Report
October 17, 2024**

Present: Councillor Cheryl Grace, Chair
Councillor Bud Halpin
Odette Bartnicki
Dan Dychuk
Cathe McIntosh
Brent Proud
Victoria Sandre

To the Mayor and Members of Council:

We, your Committee, wish to recommend the following:

That the Environmental Ad hoc Committee Final Report be received for information and referred to staff for a report back on the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee.

More detail on the above recommendations, including the research basis, rationale, and, where applicable, cost considerations, are set out in the attached Background Report and Sub-Committee reports. The Background Report is structured to align with the points that were set out in the Terms of Reference (mandate) for the Committee.

We are pleased to advise that all tasks in the Committee's Terms of Reference that were actionable in 2024 were completed.

Attachments:

1. Environmental Ad Hoc Committee Background Report
2. Partners for Climate Protection Program Sub-Committee Report
3. Community Engagement Sub-Committee Report
4. Draft Environmental Champion Award Policy

All of Which is Respectfully Submitted
by Chair C. Grace

Environmental Ad-Hoc Committee Background Report

Committee Members

Councillor Cheryl Grace, Chair
Odette Bartnicki
Dan Dychuk
Councillor Bud Halpin
Cathe McIntosh
Brent Proud
Victoria Sandre

Staff Support

Mark Paoli, Director, Development Services
Sarah Bonderud, Deputy Clerk
Frank Burrows, Manager, Parks and Facilities
Laura Moscone, Communications Specialist
Jay Pausner, Manager, Planning and Development
Jill Roote, Manager, Strategic Initiatives
Kristen Sears, Planning Policy Coordinator

Community Resources

Dr. John Anderson, Georgian Bluffs Climate Action Committee
Pavil Hawkins, ICLEI Canada

Background to Establishing the 2024 Environmental Ad-Hoc Committee

The Environmental Stewardship Ad Hoc Advisory Committee (ESAC) first met in April 2021, tasked with assessing the existing environmental sustainability policies, and making recommendations for improvements and new initiatives. Even before the destructive impact of an extreme storm on September 7, 2021, the Committee agreed that creating recommendations to address Climate Change would be one of its priorities. It also identified other and often related priorities: protecting natural assets like our waterfront, trees and wildlife, and strategies to reduce waste and reduce energy consumption. Feedback from the 535 residents who responded to the Committee's public survey informed its Final Report with 39 recommendations, presented to Council on February 14, 2022. In addition, the Committee researched extensively and consulted with experts.

Council received and reviewed the ESAC report (attached), and the Striking Committee came back to Council on March 10, 2022, directing staff to take action to fulfill selected ESAC recommendations. Council's direction included creation of a Saugeen Shores Climate Action Plan and an Urban Tree Canopy Plan, a process for establishing an annual Environmental Stewardship Award, and improvements in waste management. This Council direction formed the Environmental Ad Hoc Committee (EAC) Terms of Reference and was integrated into the 2024 Business Plan.

Committee Terms of Reference

“Environmental sustainability is a guiding principle of Saugeen Shores. Noting that one of the pillars of the Town’s Corporate Strategic Plan is “Fostering a Vibrant Place to Live and Visit” through Direction #11 “Enhance the Natural Heritage and Beauty of the Town’s Environment”, the Town is conscious of the natural assets and resources in its care and is a responsible steward in the protection of those assets and resources. In that spirit, the EAC’s Terms of Reference and work will be grounded in the nine recommendations of the Environmental Stewardship Ad-Hoc Committee that were adopted by Council in March of 2022.”

Duties of the 2024 Environmental Ad Hoc Committee

“The Committee will:

- Investigate the FCM-ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection Program and report to Council on the merits of and requirements for participating in the Program;
- Identify criteria, nomination/application processes and funding opportunities for the organization to use in a new annual Town Environmental Stewardship Award. A report will be brought forward to Council to consider the establishment of the Award;
- Comment on the development of, and support implementation of, the Urban Tree Canopy Plan through the 2024 Business Plan.
- Comment on the Town Official Plan Natural Heritage Update (if approved in 2024 Budget);
- Provide point of contact and information-sharing with Bruce County should environmental initiatives of mutual interest arise in 2024 (waste management could be one example)
- Provide recommendations on the creation of a community-led annual event to promote citizen action on the environment; and,
- Provide recommendations on ways to promote and create awareness of the above in the community.”

EAC Recommendations:

1.0 Partners for Climate Protection Program

The Partners for Climate Protection Program Sub-Committee Report is attached.

- 1.1 Join the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program first, to build momentum within the community on local climate action.
- 1.2 Join ICLEI’s Building Adaptive and Resilience Communities (BARC) program as soon as possible as there is greater funding available for municipalities with climate adaptation plans, ex. through Infrastructure Canada’s Green Municipal Fund grants program.

Rationale and Costs:

Research from the Government of Canada's National Adaptation Strategy makes clear the importance of taking action to increase climate resilience now to prevent greater costs in the future, suggesting that every one dollar invested in prevention and preparation can save up to \$15 in future costs. This includes evidence that sharply increasing municipal insurance rates can be lowered by ensuring that municipal infrastructure is climate-resilient. In addition, future grant opportunities may only be available if a municipality has a climate action plan.

Depending on whether the Town chooses to use internal staff, consultants, and apply for grants to develop a Climate Action Plan, costs could range from \$50,000 to \$300,000.

2.0 Promote and Create Awareness of the Environment

The Community Engagement Sub-Committee Report is attached.

- 2.1 Establish an Ad-Hoc Environmental Community Engagement Committee annually in the fall to stand from November 1 to May 31. The Terms of Reference of this Committee will be to promote environmental sustainability annually during Earth Month (April) through a broad level of community engagement, perspectives and experiences, communications and awareness of initiatives, and to administer the Environmental Champion Awards Program.
- 2.2 That Council prioritizes a varied demographic of members of this Committee, including secondary students who live in the municipality and representatives of Saugeen First Nation #29.
- 2.3 That the Ad-Hoc Environmental Community Engagement Committee collaborates with staff and existing external partners to consider, develop, and implement Earth Month activities.

Rationale and Costs:

The 2021 ESAC survey results indicated limited awareness of existing waste programs, such as the recycling of film plastics and ridged styrofoam. Seasonal residents may not be aware that practices differ from those in their home communities. Raising awareness should lead to improved compliance and further diversion from our landfill. Establishing annual Ad-Hoc Committees to manage community engagement initiatives will require staff support and related material expenses.

3.0 Environmental Champion Awards

The Environmental Award Policy and Appendices are attached.

- 3.1 Establish annual Environmental Champion Awards recipients in the following categories: Youth, Individual, Business, Service Club or Organization, Agricultural Practitioner, or Other as designated by an Ad-Hoc Environmental Community Engagement Committee.
- 3.2 Annually recognize individual(s) or group contributions to the protection, conservation, and enhancement of environmental sustainability in the municipality.
- 3.3 Consider creating a “community hero tree” planting initiative in Town parks. This could also exist as a public memorial or recognition program. This concept is outlined in the following article: <https://www.municipalworld.com/feature-story/trees-a-forward-thinking-investment-for-everyone/>

Rationale and Costs:

Individuals, local businesses, and various organizations have initiated and implemented many environmental initiatives. Raising awareness through public recognition supports these parties in their efforts, highlights role models, and promotes engagement in other initiatives that support environmental sustainability.

If management of the Awards Program rests primarily with the recommended Environmental Ad-Hoc Committees, costs for recognition plaques and certificates should be minimal. There will be some staff costs to help administer Ad-Hoc Committees.

4.0 Create a Community-Led Event to promote citizen action on the environment

See the Community Engagement Sub-Committee Report for details.

- 4.1 Develop and implement Earth Month and other initiatives which may include:
 - a series of communications regarding existing sustainability initiatives such as waste management practices (recycling initiatives, hazardous waste disposal, Rotary Shredder, Urban Tree Canopy Plan-related initiatives, Lake Huron Coastal activities on local beaches, energy management, etc.);
 - annual community cleanup;
 - annual tree sale;
 - public-speaking competition involving local schools and local partners;
 - poster contest for local children and youth;
 - an environment-focused event involving a guest speaker; and/or
 - recognition of Environmental Champions - awards presented at Council meetings.

Rationale and Costs:

Environmental sustainability can only be realized with changes to current practices by some residents and must include visitors and tourists through education and awareness. Survey feedback supports this recommendation. Increased public support is critical to the ongoing success of the Town's public and private environmental initiatives.

Anticipated costs could include expenses for staff support, trees, cleanup materials, facility rentals, and contests/awards.

5.0 Implementation of the Urban Tree Canopy Plan

The Committee supports the Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan and its recommendations with these additional recommendations:

5.1 The Tree Conservation By-law could focus on the following:

- 5.1.1 Protect and augment the municipal tree canopy through planting, tree maintenance, public education, and active enforcement to protect municipal trees and plants from illegal interference.
- 5.1.2 Consider directing development-sourced parks funding solely or largely to a tree replacement fund.

5.2 On privately owned lands, the Tree Conservation By-Law should focus on:

- 5.2.1 Develop canopy protection at the woodlot level by focusing on stands of trees as defined by a Town policy such as woodlots and significant woodlands.
- 5.2.2 For individual trees on smaller lots, focus on preservation education and incentivization through expanding existing subsidized tree planting programs.
- 5.2.3 Encourage public engagement and increased data collection through the development of a "Citizen Scientist"-type reporting system on private trees, including significant trees.

Rationale and Costs:

While the Committee wholeheartedly recognizes the value of trees, it also recognizes the practical limitations of enforcement, provincial planning regulations, and property rights. A Tree Conservation By-Law is needed to provide the municipality with more control over the public and private tree canopy.

The Committee supports continued protection of the Urban Tree Canopy through preservation, incentivization and educational initiatives.

Anticipated costs will include those outlined in the Urban Tree Canopy Plan and future Business Plans. Some municipal costs can be reduced through development application contributions and grants.

Other Terms of Reference Items

1. Comment on the Town Official Plan Natural Heritage Update (if approved in 2024 Budget).

The Town Official Plan Natural Heritage Update did not advance in 2024, so commenting on that did not form part of this Committee's work.

2. Providing a point of contact and information sharing with Bruce County should environmental initiatives of mutual interest arise in 2024 (Waste Management).

Bruce County did not advance environmental initiatives for which the Committee could be a first point of contact.

Next Steps

In this report, the EAC presents concrete ideas and materials to support the implementation of the 2022 ESAC selected recommendations. Appointed sub-committees contributed significant research and recommendations which were considered by the EAC. Each sub-committee's work is included as attachments to this report.

Public awareness of the Town's environmental leadership and existing programs is critical to building support for further investment in sustainable infrastructure and protection of natural assets, as well as helping individuals to increase environmental sustainability within their households. Continuing to raise public awareness of and engagement in these initiatives can be improved by establishing an annual Ad-Hoc Committee to support staff in this work. The Saugeen Shores Municipal Heritage Committee is an ongoing successful model for managing community engagement and a public award program.

Climate action is essential to achieving Canada's GHG emissions targets. As stated in the PCP's Small and Rural Communities Guidebook, municipalities control approximately 44% of national GHG emissions, and small and rural municipalities (populations of less than 30,000) make up more than 90% of communities in Canada. EAC recognizes that, with one exception, its work did not include specific references to the Saugeen Shores agricultural community but anticipates that agriculture would be an important component of a future Climate Action Plan.

The Town already has in place some of the resources and structures that would be required under the PCP program. Joining the PCP will provide resources to improve the Town's environmental initiatives and assist in completing a Climate Action Plan which will help to make the Town more climate-resilient, decrease municipal and private GHG emissions, and increase opportunities for funding through significant grants. No municipality is too small or too early in its climate action journey to have an impact. As demonstrated by the activities of the EAC, community involvement, support from municipal leaders, and creating a vision for climate action are all key steps in moving towards a more sustainable Saugeen Shores.

The recommendations of the Committee are contained within the Final report and summarized below.

That the Town of Saugeen Shores joins the FCM Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program first, to build momentum within the community on local climate action;

That the Town of Saugeen Shores join ICLEI's Building Adaptive and Resilience Communities (BARC) program as soon as possible as there is greater funding available for municipalities with climate adaptation plans, ex. through Infrastructure Canada's Green Municipal Fund grants program;

That an Ad-Hoc Environmental Community Engagement Committee be established annually in the fall to stand from November 1 to May 31 with Terms of Reference to:

- a. collaborate with staff and community partners to consider, develop, and implement Earth Month activities;
- b. promote environmental sustainability annually during Earth Month (April) through a broad level of community engagement, perspectives and experiences, communications and awareness of initiatives; and,
- c. administer the Environmental Champion Awards Program, and
- d. prioritize a varied demographic of members including secondary students who live in the municipality and representatives of the Saugeen First Nation;

That an annual Environmental Champion Awards be established for recipients in the following categories: Youth, Individual, Business, Service Club or Organization, Agricultural Practitioner, or Other as designated by an Ad-Hoc Environmental Community Engagement Committee or by Council;

That Council annually recognizes individual(s) or group contributions to the protection, conservation, and enhancement of environmental sustainability in the municipality.

That the creation of a community hero initiative or public memorial or recognition tree planting program in Town parks be considered;

That Earth Month and other initiatives be developed and implemented to raise the profile of the environment in the community; and

That the Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan and its recommendations be approved with these additional recommendations:

- e. The Tree Conservation By-law could focus on the following:
 - i. Protect and augment the municipal tree canopy through planting, tree maintenance, public education, and active enforcement to protect municipal trees and plants from illegal interference.
 - ii. Consider directing development-sourced parks funding solely or largely to a specific tree replacement fund.
- f. On privately owned lands, the Tree Conservation By-Law should focus on:
 - i. Develop canopy protection at the woodlot level by focusing on stands of trees as defined by a Town policy such as woodlots and significant woodlands.
 - ii. For individual trees on smaller lots, focus on preservation education and incentivization through expanding existing subsidized tree planting programs.
 - iii. Encourage public engagement and increased data collection through the development of a “Citizen Scientist”-type reporting system on private trees, including significant trees.