

Town to distribute \$37,000 in Climate Action Fund grants to schools, community groups]

Seven climate change mitigation projects to be funded by Town

By Zachary Roman

Caledon schools and community groups are going to receive money from the Town to complete a variety of projects that will better our environment.

At Caledon Council's February 7 General Committee meeting, Council unanimously approved on consent the dispersal of \$36,902.77 in Climate Action Fund grants to be split among seven climate change mitigation projects in the community.

In June 2022, Council approved merging the Town's community and school Green Funds into one fund called the Climate Action Fund. Erin Britnell, Caledon's Director of Corporate Strategy and Innovation, said the Town combined both the funds to streamline the application process and allow more money to be dispersed for each individual project.

Applications to the new Climate Action Fund opened in September 2022 and when the application period closed at the end of October 2022, 12 schools and community groups had put their hats in the ring to receive the up to \$8,000 available per project from the fund.

The \$8,000 dollar limit was a significant increase in funds available ? especially for schools. Before the merger, school groups could only receive up to \$2,000 and community groups up to \$5,000 for projects. Britnell said the increased limit allowed the Town to pick more impactful projects and create better outcomes in the community.

A Town of Caledon internal cross-department evaluation committee was formed to evaluate the 12 applications received last year and the Committee brought their decisions to Council in a staff report at Council's February 7, 2023 General Committee meeting.

Projects had to meet certain criteria to be eligible for funding, such as the fact that they must be based in Caledon. The projects also had to do one or more of the following: contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, enhance resilience to climate change, or educate the community about climate change action.

Applications were first reviewed by the Town's energy and environment staff to ensure they met mandatory eligibility criteria. Then, they were sent to be reviewed by the cross-departmental committee that scored the applications against a set of evaluation criteria that directly corresponded to the questions in the Climate Action Fund's application form.

Projects that scored 30 to 35 points will receive full funding, projects scoring 25 to 29 points will receive 75 per cent funding, and projects that scored 24 or below will receive no funding.

Only one application scored above 30 points, and it was from the Credit Valley Conservation Foundation. The foundation is going to receive full funding of \$8,000 to restore a ?natural hydrology regime? in a tributary of the East Credit River, according to the foundation's project summary.

?This project will increase the local system's capacity to respond to climate change and decrease flooding risk by decommissioning an online pond, weir, and restoring the area to a stream,? reads the summary.

Project summaries and anticipated project outcomes were presented at the General Committee meeting in the staff report.

Six applications scored between 25 and 29 points and will receive 75 per cent of the funding they asked for.

The Alton Village Association scored 29 points and will receive \$6,000 to expand their community pollinator and vegetable gardens.

The association plans to add three new gardens to the Alton Village square with over 100 new plants, as well as publish educational materials to act as a guide for the community gardens.

Ontario Streams also scored 29 points and is going to receive \$6,000 to restore and enhance stream habitats in Caledon by planting native trees and shrubs; litter clean-up; invasive species removal; and Atlantic Salmon releases, according to their project summary.

Ontario Streams plans to engage over 100 volunteers to do this work, as well as engage with schools. The group is aiming to plant 1,000 trees, remove 10 bags of waste, and remove 500 square metres of invasive European Blackthorn.

Belfountain Public School scored 27 points and will receive \$1597.02 to install an Atlantic Salmon classroom hatchery.

Students will raise and release salmon from egg to fry to increase biodiversity and reinstate a self-sustaining native population, reads their project summary. This will increase environmental awareness through hands-on experience and teach students about biology, history and ecology.

Some of the deliverables from the project include 300 engaged students and annual Atlantic Salmon releases going forward.

Macville Public School also scored 27 points and is set to receive \$4,905 to create an outdoor learning centre with a pollinator garden, classroom learning space, compost centre, and pathway through a habitat revitalization area. Four workshops with Indigenous speakers will be part of the Macville Public School project, as well as the planting of 40 trees, shrubs, and perennials.

Caledon Central Public School scored 26 points and will be receiving \$4,588.25 to introduce four freestanding hydroponic gardening systems at the school.

Youth will be educated through school-wide info sessions, hydroponic growing studies, produce-sourced luncheons, and school farmer's markets, reads their project summary.

The final group to receive funding will be ecoCaledon, which scored 25 points. Being dispersed to them will be \$5,812.50 for a Caledon Cares Environment Challenge Series.

According to ecoCaledon's project summary, the Challenge will be a series of events to engage

residents on various key environmental solutions such as food, energy, and climate adaptation/mitigation strategies. The group expects attendance from over 600 Caledon residents and will create 20 media releases to promote their events.

Feedback is going to be provided from the Town to the unsuccessful applicants in hopes they can succeed in the next Climate Action Fund.