

Business as usual is not an option, say environmental advocates

BY ROB PAUL

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At the Caledon Town Council general committee meeting on April 20, Lucrezia Chiappetta from ecoCaledon—a local not-for-profit organization that works on environmental projects in the Town—and resident Jennifer LeForestier delegated on the Resilient Caledon Community Climate Change Action Plan Update.

On behalf of ecoCaledon and residents of Caledon, Ms. Chiappetta requested Council approve and begin the implementation of the action plan update as the climate crisis continues to pose a threat to the future

‘The evidence is clear, there’s now more carbon dioxide in the air than at any time in the last three million years,’ she said. ‘Each day, we’re faced with a number of stories about environmental risks and disasters, vanishing wilderness, and endangered species. We have

reached an unprecedented moment in planetary history. Humans now change the Earth and its processes more than all natural forces combined. No challenge poses a greater threat to future generations than climate changes. No one is immune to the effects of climate change; the climate crisis effects every corner of our planet—from the poles to the tropics and from the mountains to the oceans. People and nature worldwide are already feeling the effects. Everything we do has an impact on our planet.’

With the current way the climate change crisis is trending, ecoCaledon is concerned with how it could impact the Town in the near future if a plan isn’t executed soon, but is thankful for the environmental leadership the Town has shown for the policies, programs, and partnerships they’ve undertaken to protect and enhance Caledon’s environment.

‘We know from the action plan update that Caledon’s future climate is projected to be warmer, wetter, and more unpredictable,’ said Ms. Chiappetta. ‘Business as usual is not an option. In the words of Mayor Thompson, ‘we cannot afford to sit back and wait for others to act.’ Municipalities such as Caledon have direct or indirect influence over half of Canada’s emissions and are responsible for decisions around land use, planning, new development, transportation and transit that are crucial to achieving zero emission.’

Council declared a climate change emergency in Caledon in January 2020, asking staff to report back on the scale of actions required by the Town to align with the international target to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. In June 2020, they adopted a community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target of net zero by 2050.

‘The targets mean we need to act quickly,’ Ms. Chiappetta said. ‘The 60 actions outlined in the action plan update not only aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also improve air quality, preserve habitat and biodiversity, improve health and sustainability, create jobs, and prepare community members for increased climate impacts. We at ecoCaledon look forward to supporting the Town’s initiatives and helping residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprints. We can still escape the worst impacts of climate change and build a safer future for all.’

LaForestier shared her concerns regarding consultation with indigenous groups and issues focused on land and water protection within the action plan asking for more effort and thought be put towards allowing land to be displaced or built on.

‘As a resident surrounded by pit applications concerned about future impacts to wells and drinking water, the action plan does not address the communities needs to be resilient nor mention aggregate,’ she said. ‘The Community Climate Action Plan is timely as the COVID pandemic has highlighted a critical need for food security from local sources during crisis periods and is one of the key factors in the subsequent economic recovery.’

Ontario has some of the best agricultural land in Canada, much of which isn't protected by current land use planning policies. I formally request that every aggregate license issued in the Town of Caledon undergo consultation and written permission from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, that the Town require cumulative social and health impact studies before approving zoning or licenses to represent public interest?as is done in Waterloo region?that the plan audit and omit aggregate resource areas that are harmful to the Credit River, that the official plan review include cancelling approvals for extraction below the water table and review the plan to address fully the impact of water extraction in Caledon and adopt more stringent requirements for aggregate licensing like other regions.?

In response Chief Planner Sylvia Kirkwood explained that they've been meeting with the Mississaugas of the Credit to build an approved strategy and protocol by both sides for how to move forward with land development. Kirkwood mentioned October 2021 as a timeline for when these protocols will be brought forth.

The implementation of the Resilient Caledon Plan will require investments from the community and town with preliminary estimates of Town costs over the next 10 years in the range of \$24 to \$31 million. Establishing a Resilient Caledon Task Force to support community-wide implementation has also been proposed.

There is no doubt that Caledon is feeling the impacts of climate change firsthand, Mayor Thompson said. In March 2019, the Bolton ice jam saw more than 200 people being forced to evacuate their homes due to flooding. Every year we're seeing more storms, higher temperatures and changes to the flora and fauna around us. The Town acknowledges the challenge of climate change, and we recognize the threat that it poses to our residents, businesses, farmers, and the Town's own operations. That's why earlier this year Council unanimously declared a climate change emergency and committed to taking serious action on climate change, including adopting a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.?

This Plan builds on Caledon's achievements as an environmental leader, including being one of only 30 municipalities across Canada to complete all five milestones of the Partners for Climate Protection Program, pioneering a Green Development Program to encourage commercial developers to construct energy efficient buildings, installing 22 publicly available electric vehicle charging stations, running the Green Fund and Tree Seedling programs to help the community take environmental action in their own neighbourhoods, and leading by example with energy and emissions reductions in our own Town facilities and operations. But the challenges are becoming greater.

Warming around the world and especially in Canada is increasing every year, leading to more frequent and severe impacts. These impacts are most often felt locally. As a municipality, we can't afford to sit back and wait for others to act. We also know that Caledon is a growing community, with the population expected to double over the next 20 years. How we accommodate that growth will be critical to not only meet our climate change targets, but also to ensure that all Caledon residents live in safe, sustainable, and accessible communities now and into the future.

In this way, the Resilient Caledon Plan places a strong emphasis on maximizing the many co-benefits of climate action, including for local economic development, public health and air quality, preservation and enhancement of our natural and agricultural areas, and the well-being of all our diverse residents.

It's clear that many Caledon residents are already taking action on climate change, from improving the efficiency of their homes or switching to electric vehicles, to farmers using innovative measures to improve soil health, to businesses installing solar panels, to young people getting involved in local climate advocacy and solutions. The Resilient Caledon Plan aims to raise the ambition of what the Town and broader community can do to embrace a more resilient, low carbon, and livable future. I want to thank all the staff, stakeholders and residents who contributed to the development of this plan, and I look forward to working together with the entire community to achieve a Resilient Caledon.?

The updated plan has a total of 60 actions organized into five categories: smart growth? which focuses on Caledon's new communities being low carbon, resilient to climate impacts, prioritizing energy efficiency, walkability, effective stormwater management, and green space; sustainable communities? to prepare residents for climate impacts and have the capacity to reduce

emissions and build resilience in their own homes, businesses, and neighbourhoods; ?agriculture and natural systems? ensuring they're protected and enhanced to maximize carbon sequestration and resilience to climate impacts like flooding, invasive species, and pests; ?low carbon transportation? that allows for residents and businesses to use low or zero-carbon options for transportation through more accessible cycling, walking, and transit with the expansion of safe and efficient infrastructure; and ?resilient infrastructure and energy? with core infrastructure assets that are better able to withstand major weather events like storms, flooding, and freeze-thaw cycles.