

King adopts corporate energy plan

By Mark Pavilons

King Township has approved its ambitious corporate energy management and conservation plan, complying with provincial regulations.

But the move to set the corporate target at 35% reduction through 2030 was seen by the public as a step backwards, and a retreat from council's previously set goal of 45%.

King CAO Dan Kostopoulos stressed the Township has not abandoned its overall goal of 45% but the new rate applies only to corporate operations. Other tools and strategies, coupled with a new Climate Change Plan coming in 2020 will set the stage and keep the 45% target in sight.

King passed the plan during its final meeting of the year Dec. 2, time to meet the deadline from Queen's Park. The plan surfaced Nov. 18 but went back to staff for some minor tweaking and changes before returning last week.

The delay Nov. 18 came from councillors, who didn't want the aggressive energy targets to negatively impact services to residents. Mayor Steve Pellegrini was adamant that the plan not interfere with recreational activities, in particular the availability of summer ice surfaces. Councillor Bill Cober agreed, noting he won't accept service level cuts. He said if King has to backtrack on its 45% reduction goal, so be it.

Staff altered some of the wording to make the targets more aspirations than concrete numbers. They also came up with the 35% figure for the corporate GHG emission reductions.

Chris Fasciano, director of parks, recreation and culture, pointed out in the staff report the 45% is the over-arching target and can be achieved through a number of efforts. The 35% target at the corporate level can be achieved through efficiencies within Township facilities, both in day-to-day operations and extending the life cycles of the buildings. A green fleet strategy will be developed to usher in technologically advanced vehicles. Internal incentives and promoting energy responsibility to staff will also help in this regard.

Members of the public didn't accept this line of thinking, and spoke out in force against dropping the number.

A King City resident said we're a green community and we have to be leaders. He recommended some internal changes to curb the use of lights at the municipal centre, especially keeping them on late at night.

Dr. Hans Martin has spent most of his life studying climate change and he said the signs have been evident for decades.

Concentrations of CO₂ have never been higher or accelerating more quickly than they are today. He believes curbing services such as summer ice use is worth it.

Ann Raney said this move by council has set us all back. She quoted UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who spoke at COP25, warning the world we're on a path of no return and we can't stick our heads in the sand. If we don't urgently change our way of life, we jeopardize life itself, he said. That means important decisions must be made now.

Saving energy saves money in the long-term Raney said, noting while the science is obvious, what's lacking is the political will. Hundreds of cities around the world are committed to reaching targets by 2030 and King has an opportunity to set the standard.

Bruce Craig urged councillors to stay the course and retain the 45% target. We can get there, he said, noting King residents are quite blessed and sheltered. But the fact remains that Canada is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world and the past four summers have been the hottest on record. If we don't meet the 2030 targets, an irreversible chain of events will be set in motion. What King does matters; any action matters, he said.

Resident Keith Beckley said we have 11 years or so to reach the goal and technology is moving forward very fast. Efficiencies are coming and the advancements will help us reach the 45%, which he believes is not that ambitious.

An Aurora resident said King is has a fantastic reputation in York and other municipalities look to them for leadership. Lowering the target will set a terrible precedent, she remarked.

Nobleton resident Nancy Hopkinson submitted a letter prior to Monday night's council meeting, asking that the 45% target not be lowered.

Climate change is important and this was shown by the voters at the ballot box during the federal election.

The world is warming and we must do our part to prevent it warming even more.

Many of the steps that King Township has already done are commendable. We admire the work at the Trisan Centre with its solar panels on the edges of the parking lot. We admire the geothermal heating of the new municipal building. We need King Township to keep moving forward on great initiatives like those.

We need to have public consultations. Cancelling programs does not have to be the way.

We need to consider projects outside the box.

Kingscross resident Rosalind Elson, in a letter to council, pointed out the best scientific minds across the globe came up with the target of a 45% reduction in GHG by 2030. We have to believe it. These scientists do not stand to make money from this decision nor have they any secret agenda. It is a fact that 45% is the target we must have.

She admitted it will be difficult to achieve.

It is going to hurt. We have to change our way of living. Now we have to pay the bills.

She said too much lip service is being paid to the idea of caring about climate change and too little leadership is being shown in taking steps to mitigate the effects that climate change is already having upon the world.

She urged council not to retreat from the courageous stand it took in June to attempt to achieve a 45% reduction in GHG by 2030.

She didn't agree with council concerns about the loss of services. The loss of summer ice is negligible compared to the cost to be paid by our children if we do not act.

Fasciano reminded councillors and the public to think of this in context, especially when considering goals and targets. The energy plan is but a piece of the corporate strategy, not the whole puzzle. Staff will still bring forward the Climate Change Plan in the new year, which, combined with future changes, will help us reach the ultimate target.

He admitted none of the municipalities know the full context of the provincial mandate quite yet and there are a lot of unknowns.

The Township has to be credible and set some realistic targets.

Facilities and their usage will continue to be monitored.

Approving the energy plan doesn't mean the work ends, rather it's a start. King, he stressed, has been looking at energy efficiency for years and many small steps have helped improved things already. The plan gives staff and council a new lens to apply on the day-to-day operations.

One measure already in the works is the installation of electric vehicle charging stations. The Township has applied for government funding to install these devices.

Fasciano said staff will work with residents to identify opportunities in the future as we move forward.

Councillor Bill Cober admitted this is a new journey for us, adding they will definitely embrace new technologies as they arrive.

The plan provides a path for the Township to follow, but it's an ongoing process.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer was the lone opposition to the staff recommendations, siding with residents.

She said council needs to send the message that they want to be bold. No one is exactly sure how to achieve the goal, but over time we'll figure it out.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said everything requires a balance and some measures will result in a heavy financial impact. King has many green policies on the books already. As far as enticing developers to build net zero emission buildings, they're happy to do so, but it means even more intensification.

He wants to consult with all stakeholders, especially community groups, before making big decisions on services. The little steps, he said, will get us there.

Councillor David Boyd said we all have to bear a bit of the responsibility and residents have to do their part in reducing emissions.

This plan, he said, represents a huge impact and it sends a message and clear direction to staff.

Councillor Jordan Cescolini said he's happy with the 35% corporate target and working towards the ultimate goal of 45%

The Township is required under legislation to update its plan, previously completed in 2013. The updated plan was presented to committee in June, and it included an aspirational target of 45% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030.

Also in June, council declared a climate emergency, setting the target for reductions from all initiatives to 45%.

Staff reported that the energy management plan is only one tool to help achieve this goal.

The plan guides King's efforts for reducing energy relating to facilities, streetlights and its vehicle fleet. It sets goals and benchmarks to allow staff to measure improvements over time.

More avenues will arise from the development of the Climate Change Plan, which will explore a broader spectrum approach to provide the entire community with overarching goals for future reductions in both energy consumption and GHG emissions.

This plan could include things like tree plantings, wetland restoration, trail development, electric vehicle charging stations and

pushing for net-zero buildings.

Meeting the target will be challenging.

?To achieve the 45% reduction in Green House Gases (GHG) ? the Township must reduce or otherwise offset its current levels by 630,000 kg.?

Staff pointed out to put this in perspective, King's overall emissions in 2018 were 1.3 million kg., with 600,000 kgs. coming from the fleet alone.

?Due to this, a strong focus for the next 3-5 years will be transitioning our fleet to alternative fuels such as electric and compressed natural gas. This conversion will have the greatest reduction impact with the least financial impact,? staff reported.

They suggested that future projects could focus on conversion of mechanical systems, building envelope improvements, solar panel installations, etc.

Staff did stress that in order to achieve the 45% reduction, financial support will be required.

These financial implications are ?significant? and staff will ask for additional funds to be included in the 2020-2022 operating budgets.

?Any incremental funding for energy management related projects will be re-evaluated based on reductions recognized as part of a three-year initial phase and the remaining level of reduction needed to reach the 2030 target.?