

Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

Phase one engagement overview

Phase one engagement for the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan [ICSP] ran from February 17 to March 16, 2022. This phase of engagement asked about the current state of Cobourg, and what gaps might exist for sustainable improvement locally. Overall, we heard from 187 residents through the formal process, and more through email and the Town website.

Engagement methods

- Online questionnaire hosted on the Town of Cobourg's engagement platform (engagcobourg.ca)
- "Current state" workshop on Thursday, March 3, 2022
- Direct email outreach and follow-up
- Commentary & communication hosted on the Town's engagement platform

What we asked

In the phase one engagement, we asked:

- How would you describe your experience with sustainability (and sustainable development) in Cobourg?
- What is the most sustainable action you take? What is a sustainable action you would like to take, but cannot?
- What do you believe the Town of Cobourg's sustainability priorities should be?
- Are there sustainable initiatives which you have seen elsewhere that may be appropriate for Cobourg?
- What tools should the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan use to advance sustainability in Cobourg?
- What trends do we currently see in various data points (topics including: Greenhouse Gasses, Housing, Culture, Resource Consumption, Watershed Health, and Economy), and where are there opportunities to improve each of these areas?

What we heard

Cross-method findings:

Over the various engagement methods, participants provided a diversity of feedback. Several recurrent themes emerged from participant feedback (public feedback examples provided):

1. Increase opportunities for active transportation within and to Cobourg

- A. *I would love to be able to cycle to and from work (Port Hope) but find HWY 2 too dangerous. How wonderful would it be to cycle along the lake to work on designated bike ONLY paths.*
- B. *Walking the winter unmaintained sidewalks and paths in the parks. Peace Park as an example. You have a trail and bridge to encourage people to use yet it is not cleared in the winter months.*
- C. *Walking and walking. Walking is essentially useless in Cobourg north of University Ave as the town has been built around cars past that point.*

2. Embodying low-impact, energy efficient and sustainable growth through Green Development Standards

- A. *The impact of residential and commercial units built today needs to be considered over the next 30 years as we move towards net-zero. The green development standards can't be put into place soon enough.*
- B. *The implementation of new HVAC and Passive Building Design standards have been a large part of the Toronto and GTA development strategy. Specifically, through the Toronto Green Standard (TGS). This standard sets a precedent moving forward for all new buildings.*
- C. *Green development standards also include parks, wastewater management, etc. This can be a key tool to achieve reduction of resource consumption.*

3. Reducing built environment GHG emissions through energy efficient building practices and renewable energy sources

- A. *I would be interested in converting home heating to renewable energy, but the high cost remains a barrier.*
- B. *Replacing gas heating with electrical heating from sustainable sources ... programs to teach people how to make their homes/rentals more energy efficient and cost friendly, grants for solar panels, ... grants for geo-thermal heating.*
- C. *Energy independence through addition of solar and windmill in industrial areas as well as adding it to municipal buildings such as Library, County building in Cobourg, and to encourage local residents to add it to their homes*

4. Improving energy efficiency in the transportation sector

- A. *With regard to transit, we have to move to on demand transit and small electric shuttles for Cobourg.*
- B. *We have to make sure that EV charging infrastructure does not become the limiting factor in the take-up of EV's.*
- C. *Special, right at the front parking for electric vehicles - downtown, at the beach, at the mall, everywhere. Also electric vehicles park for free everywhere.*

5. Promoting affordability, density, and walkability through sustainable urban development.

- A. *Affordability for low income families within energy efficient housing that is also culturally and economically diverse. (ie: not all rent to income or subsidized housing in a building, but a mix of families who can lend support to one another.)*
- B. *A mix of housing to ensure affordability for all residents, both owned and rental.*
- C. *Have the Town set an example by doing infill housing and not using up more agricultural land.*

6. Support local biodiversity and the integrity of the urban forest

- A. *Offer to plant trees free of charge for residents who are willing to have them.*
- B. *Preventing trees from being cut down (planting trees is good but takes 50 years to work)*
- C. *I would like to increase the level of biodiversity by assisting with the planning and development of native species plant corridors throughout Cobourg in order to prompt increased survival rate in native birds and insects.*

7. Assist local efforts to improve waste diversion.

- A. *Ban the use of styrofoam and plastics by grocery stores and shipping packaging of appliances. The use of biodegradable packaging should be enforced.*
- B. *Having better signage for waste/recycle. Like I think in BC I saw signage that actually cited the amount of GHG that a certain amount of waste produced and Canada's global ranking in the world for meeting their GHG reduction commitments (which is not great).*
- C. *Highlighting events that promote sustainability like the Rib-Fest where they concentrated on producing NO WASTE. That was awesome to see.*
- D. *Urban agriculture in london ont, includes decentralized compost, curbside sale, rezoning for food production across zones*

8. Support sustainable outcomes through good governance, consistent collaboration, and dedicated funding

- A. *Encourage municipal partnerships with neighbourhood citizen groups and advocacy.*
- B. *Partnerships with other municipalities and companies in Canada developing integrated environmental systems.*
- C. *Establish a sustainability officer and create a sustainability website. The latter will strengthen social connectedness and increase the social capital available to the municipality. Both of these are critical elements for the success of sustainability [initiatives].*

D. *Displaying in the hall of our Town Hall what achievements have been made to meet the Climate Emergency and showing the contents of our most recent Climate Action Plan. That could also be at our Community Centre.*

Question-specific findings:

How would you describe your experience with sustainability (and sustainable development) in Cobourg?

Overall, public commentary generally reinforced the idea that there is much more to be done in Cobourg where sustainability is concerned. Public feedback themes included, in descending order:

1. ambivalence/mixed feelings (14)
2. limited experience or opportunity (8)
3. improvement and greater community involvement required (8), and
4. generally negative views (7)

What is the most sustainable action you take? What is a sustainable action you would like to take, but cannot?

This joined-up question asked participants to consider the actions they take and don't take due to constraints. The most commonly referenced themes from both of these questions highlight the most prominent actions:

1. active transportation (21)
2. recycling (15)
3. deep energy retrofits (12)
4. alternative energy forms (6)
5. reducing consumption (12)
6. electric vehicles (10), and
7. gardening on private property (9)

What do you believe the Town of Cobourg's sustainability priorities should be?

Responses were reflective of policy direction and the contemporary challenges facing Cobourg in particular, and the world in general. Top themes included:

1. renewable and efficient energy solutions (36)
2. affordable housing (20)
3. active transportation (17)
4. biodiversity and naturalization (17)
5. green development standard design and implementation (12), and
6. development boundaries and caps on growth (12)

Are there sustainable initiatives which you have seen elsewhere that may be appropriate for Cobourg?

The most commonly identified initiatives that Cobourg should consider adopting from other municipalities were:

1. best practices and benchmarking with other municipalities (11),
2. active transportation (9),
3. green development standards (4),
4. and renewable energy (4).

Respondents pointed to a diversity of lessons learned including:

- Implementing separated bicycle tracks (Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto)
- A visitor tax to improve local services and invest in sustainable initiatives (Germany)
- Green development standards (Toronto)
- Urban agriculture regulation for land use, growing, and sale (London, ON)
- Signage highlighting the relationship between waste and GHG emissions (British Columbia)
- Benchmarking, labeling, and disclosure for building energy use (Montreal, Vancouver), and
- Effective public education to promote GHG emissions reduction at the household level (Dundee, Scotland).

What tools should the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan use to advance sustainability in Cobourg?

The highest ranked answers from respondents were:

1. education and outreach (57 responses)
2. infrastructure development (51)
3. bylaws and policies (50)
4. financial incentives (39).