

Lanark County moves forward with Climate Action Plan

Since adopting its Climate Action Plan in January 2020, Lanark County has taken some decisive actions towards achieving goals for sustainability.

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment is a core strategy in the county's 2005 Strategic Plan, and council established "climate and environment" as one of its top five priorities for this term.

"We need a holistic approach with a multitude of strategies in order to reach a level of sustainability in our county," explains CAO Kurt Greaves. "Climate change and environmental degradation are defining challenges of our time."

A work plan outline set goals for this year and includes strategies related to grant research and applications, homes, forests and farms, industry, waste diversion, transportation, municipal buildings, and public engagement. A number of actions are already underway.

In collaboration with all the local municipalities and the Town of Smiths Falls, the county is moving forward with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Partners for Climate Protection Program. A summer intern position is dedicated to moving this work forward. Initial projects are being funded under the provincial Municipal Modernization Fund, and the Climate Action Plan includes current local-tier plans.

Currently, a Transportation survey is being conducted to gather information on the current level of green house gas emissions. The public is asked to please help us collect the data we need by completing the survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019LCTravel>.

Homeowners can get involved in reducing emissions related to heating and cooling with the "Insulate Lanark" program, which piggybacks the existing "Renovate Lanark" program. Low-income families can apply for funds to help insulate their homes.

Recognizing the effectiveness of trees in carbon capture, cleaning the air and building ecosystems, Lanark County has launched the "One Million Trees" program, which aims to see at least 1 million trees planted in the county over the next 10 years. The program is in conjunction with local conservation authorities, which offer programs for landowners to encourage tree planting. Already over 60,000 trees are being planted in 2020 including 10,000 in Lanark County Community Forests. On June 20, a free seedling giveaway happened at Beckwith Park. Based on the overwhelming positive response a bigger program will occur in 2021! Anyone who has space for 1,000 plus trees should contact the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA). The RVCA works directly with landowners and plants trees starting for as little as 15 cents per tree. Contact Meaghan.mcdonald@rvca.ca for more information.

The forests and farms component of the Climate Action Plan also strives to support the wood industry and help the Alternative Land Use Service to get established in Lanark County, which provides tree planting and wetland buffers and reduced herbicide use.

Potential initiatives for industry include looking for incentives related to utilities, working with Valley Heartland Community Futures Corporation, communications about best practices and incentives, and financing an energy audit program.

On the waste diversion front, the county is aiming to reduce single-use plastics by distributing reusable produce bags and conducting a communication campaign to encourage their use. Supporting the provincial move toward supplier-pay recycling, as well as encouraging and expanding compost programs, are also on the agenda. A public survey had over 1,100 responses showing a high level of public interest.

Transportation strategies include promoting ride sharing in partnership with other counties, active transportation (such as Bicycle Month throughout June) and using the website to promote local transportation options and recharge stations.

In May, Lanark County Council approved a motion to support local municipalities with the purchase of one electric or hybrid vehicle by the end of 2022 with a grant matching an available federal subsidy for that purpose. Funding for the program comes from the modernization funding set aside for the Climate Action Plan.

“It is hoped this incentive will encourage local municipalities to add an electric or hybrid vehicle to their fleets,” Mr. Greaves said. “It’s a direct partnership with the local municipalities to take collective action on climate change and help spread the message of the environmental and economic benefits of electric vehicles.”

The county will also be working to incorporate green design standards into new buildings, such as the social housing development in Carleton Place and the Lanark Lodge redevelopment.

“Engagement is an important part of the Climate Action Plan,” Mr. Greaves added. “Throughout the process we will update the public on our progress and ask for ideas. We all have to work together to make sustainability a reality and to improve our environment.”

“Lanark County is known for taking leadership roles on important issues,” Warden Brian Campbell (Tay Valley Township Reeve) said. “The Lanark County Climate Action Plan is important to our future and is designed to help build momentum to together move climate action projects forward.”

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