



Council report

Meeting date:	September 7, 2021
Title:	Strategic Vision Plan 2021 Areas of Focus and CAO Projects Update
Prepared by:	Laura Johnston, CAO

Recommendation

That council receives report Strategic Vision Plan 2021 Areas of Focus and CAO Projects Update report for information.

Executive summary

Attached are the status charts for the 2021 areas of focus from the 2020-2022 strategic vision plan. This report also outlines progress on the four corporate projects directed by council in April 2021.

Background and discussion

In February 2020, West Grey council adopted the 2020-2022 Strategic Vision Plan. The plan has three pillars: 1) Work Together; 2) Build a Better Future; and 3) Promote Community and provides a road map to guide the municipality forward to 2022. Quarterly reports have been presented to council throughout 2020.

Budget cuts and event cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted and will continue to affect some completion dates and community initiatives.

Given factors such as budget constraints, operating under a pandemic, and the need to set work plan goals, a revised approach was presented to council in April 2021. The proposal was that staff continue aligning regular work to the pillars of the strategic plan and any new or special projects be paused, except the following four significant projects:

- develop and implement a Customer Service Strategy;
- update and finalize the Asset Management Plan (with a new provincial deadline of July 1, 2022);
- develop and implement a Climate Action Plan; and
- develop and adopt an Economic Development Strategy.

These four projects align with a number of action items in the Strategic Vision Plan. However, this proposal was contingent on addressing the increased staffing levels as recommended in



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the 2020 Organizational Review. The resourcing and funding requests were included in the 2021 budget but were not approved; however, the four special projects remained active. These projects have, and will continue to, put additional pressures on staff workload across the corporation. While some specific strategies have been implemented or are pending implementation, without addressing workload capacity, there are risks to the success of each project. This report also addresses how capacity issues will be resolved.

Customer Service Strategy

There is no budget for this project and no specific staff lead, so a staff team comprised of employees from the clerk's department, finance, community services and public works was formed. This team has been working on developing the West Grey Customer Service Strategy. The goal of the strategy is to create a customer-centric corporate culture. The strategy will also identify deliverables such as response time standards, tactics to deal with difficult situations, processes to ensure consistent internal communication and implementing a Corporate Customer Service training program. To date, staff has established rotating schedules for counter and phone coverage. As well, staff is completing a Request for Proposals for a new phone system that was identified in the Municipal Modernization Fund allocation. One of the preliminary steps in developing the Customer Service Strategy is an accessible document training session for staff, scheduled for the morning of September 23, 2021. To ensure all staff has the opportunity to receive this important training the municipal office will be closed for the morning, and a public notice will be issued to this effect.

Pressures: Finding time to dedicate to this project is an ongoing challenge. This staff team is our front-line employees and statutory duties and responding to the day-to-day tasks must take precedence. Additionally, there have been staff changes, which affects workloads given the need for onboarding and training. There is very little opportunity for the staff team to step away from these responsibilities to work on developing a strategy. Work will continue as staff are able.

Economic Development Strategic Plan

With considerable support from the economic development staff at Grey County, there was some notable progress on the economic development strategic plan, including developing a project plan with input from the Economic Development Advisory Committee. COVID-19 restrictions, however, have delayed some key initiatives such as business visits and community tours. Staff has recently been able to start these interviews with the updated public health guidelines.

One West Grey staff member has been assigned to support this project and has been working with an economic development officer at the county on data gathering and developing the communication and engagement strategy. The West Grey Economic Development Advisory Committee has received regular project updates and the committee members will play an



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important role in contributing to the draft strategy in the future.

Pressures: There is no budget allocated to this project, and without the support, assistance and expertise of county staff, this project would have to be outsourced to a consultant team. Additionally, while the CAO has prioritized this project in the workload planning, it will be important to monitor competing pressures against the project's progress.

Climate Action Plan

In 2019, West Grey council declared a climate crisis. In 2021, West Grey became a member of the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP), a program associated with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). A condition of the PCP membership is to appoint a corporate champion and a champion from the municipality's council. Council appointed Councillor Hamilton and CAO Johnston. Since that time, Councillor Hamilton and CAO Johnston have participated in the first workshop for Milestone 1 dealing with creating the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions inventory, which will assist in tracking emissions, energy use and energy spending as well as measure future progress. The next workshop is on September 8, 2021 and focuses on setting climate targets.

Additionally, West Grey council approved a revamped advisory committee to focus on environmental issues. The Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC) consisted of five volunteer citizens and Councillors Hamilton and Shea. At the time of writing this report, however, one member had stepped down. The CAO attended the meetings, primarily to keep the Climate Action Plan (CAP) progressing. Future meetings will involve input from committee members on the draft CAP and initiatives related to the CAP. The CAAC is also focused on environmental issues that affect the health of our community. More information will come directly to council in the coming months.

As part of the 2021 budget process, West Grey council directed staff to allocate \$50,000 from the provincial Municipal Modernization Grant for a Climate Action Plan (CAP). In August, a Request for Proposal was issued to retain a consultant to create the West Grey Climate Action Plan. Grey County has completed a draft CAP that includes corporate and community assets inventories. Because of the county's work, the local CAP can focus on the corporate inventory and can access much of the community inventory data from the county. In July 2021, Grey County hired a Manager, Climate Change Initiatives on a two-year contract. The manager will be an important resource for the local municipalities. West Grey's CAO met with the Manager to leverage her expertise and support.

Pressures: Despite retaining a consultant team to lead the development of a Climate Action Plan, the consultant cannot complete their work without relying heavily on municipal staff. Several meetings and interviews with staff across the corporation will be required. In addition, staff will be required to gather and provide data, documentation and information to the consultant team. There is always a risk to the success of projects based on current workload



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pressures.

The 2021 budget, and the findings of the 2020 Organizational Review, recommended an Environmental Officer staff position to support this project, its ongoing implementation and future reporting. The Environmental Officer position would also proactively lead other environmental initiatives:

- energy initiatives in conjunction with the asset management plan
- update and execute the energy conservation and demand management plan
- manage and oversee specific legislative responsibilities under the Certificate of Approval for the landfill operations
- manage the contract with our waste management provider
- oversee the blue box transition to producer responsibility
- lead and manage a community communication and education campaign on environmental initiatives
- foster and champion a corporate culture shift to environmental best practices.

This position will be requested again in the 2022 budget. Without a qualified staff and budget to manage these initiatives there is a risk that the studies and resulting priorities will not be implemented as intended.

Asset Management Plan

In January 2018, the provincial government implemented the Asset Management Planning for Municipal Infrastructure Regulation, O. Reg. 588/17. This was implemented to help address the issue many Ontario municipalities were facing in managing infrastructure that was degrading faster than it is being repaired or replaced. The goal of this regulation is to help improve the way municipalities plan for their infrastructure. The regulation builds on the progress municipalities have made while bringing consistency and standardization to asset management plans to help spread best practices throughout the sector and enable the collection of comparable data.

The province recently announced a revised phase-in schedule to meet the requirements of the regulation. The dates, as listed on the provincial website are:

- July 1, 2019: Date for municipalities to have a finalized strategic asset management policy that promotes best practices and links asset management planning with budgeting, operations, maintenance and other municipal planning activities.
- July 1, 2022: Date for municipalities to have an approved asset management plan for core assets (roads, bridges and culverts, water, wastewater and stormwater management systems) that identifies current levels of service and the cost of maintaining those levels of service.
- July 1, 2024: Date for municipalities to have an approved asset management plan for all municipal infrastructure assets that identifies current levels of service and the



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cost of maintaining those levels of service.

- July 1, 2025: Date for municipalities to have an approved asset management plan for all municipal infrastructure assets that builds upon the requirements set out in 2024. This includes an identification of proposed levels of service, what activities will be required to meet proposed levels of service, and a strategy to fund these activities.

The Municipality of West Grey has an asset management plan (AMP) that meets provincial regulations. This plan requires ongoing updates due to changes in the asset or the financial fluctuations to maintaining assets. Additionally, council is interested in expanding the AMP to include natural inventory.

In the 2021 budget, council approved a \$60,000 increase to the wages and salaries budget. While originally linked to a specific position in community services, an internal review of urgent needs and legislated requirements has highlighted the need for support staff in the finance department to assist with forecasting, variance reporting and long-range budgeting – particularly with a lens to asset management. While the 2020 Organizational Review identified staffing gaps in the finance department; the request was not approved in the 2021 budget. Because the \$60,000 is now part of the base budget, adding a finance analyst will not result in additional, future, tax dollar support. Given this significant staffing gap, the need to meet legislative deadlines and the opportunity to recruit an analyst within this existing budget, the CAO will be proceeding with a recruitment for an Administrative Assistant – Finance and Asset Management, later this fall.

Legal and legislated requirements

Municipal Act, 2001, as amended.

Financial and resource implications

Funds are designated to departments in the 2021 budget to meet the goals of the Strategic Vision Plan. Initiatives not captured or resourced for 2021 will come to council for consideration.

Staffing implications

Various, depending on the initiative.

Consultation

West Grey senior management team

Alignment to strategic vision plan



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Pillar: work together

Goal: clear communication

Attachments

Pillar 1: Work together - 2021 areas of focus – Q2 update

Pillar 2: Build a better future - 2021 areas of focus – Q2 update

Pillar 3: Promote community - 2021 areas of focus – Q2 update

Next steps

Workload priorities will focus on meeting legislated deadlines. Work will continue on the four key projects in this report as appropriate and staff will continue providing future progress updates.

Respectfully submitted:

Laura Johnston, CAO