

BurlingtonGreen's Comments on the City of Burlington's Proposed 2020 Budget

Introduction:

BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association has been the solution-focused voice for the environment in Burlington for the past 12 years. To date, we have advocated on more than 100 environmental issues including sustainable growth at the municipal and provincial level. Through awareness, advocacy, and action, we collaborate with the community to protect the environment, mitigate climate change and to create a healthier, more environmentally responsible Burlington.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input on the City of Burlington 2020 budget. Many communities, including ours, are already feeling the impacts of climate change. City Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency demonstrated that Council recognizes how serious of a threat climate change is and why we need to urgently invest in effective solutions to mitigate its worst effects. All levels of government play a role in fighting climate change and need to come together.

We have broken our feedback down into the following key points, in addition to advocating for a holistic environmental framework to support the City Council declaration of a climate emergency.

1. Take on more debt to address the climate emergency.

- We understand that municipalities are hesitant to take on debt, but the City of Burlington is in the fortunate position of being able to take on more short-term debt to deal with the climate crisis. The reality that we face is that money spent today can help to reduce costs in the long run. By investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, the City will be fare better in the climate of tomorrow, while investing in necessary infrastructure and services for its residents at the same time.
- The 2020 budget report notes that: "The City's total debt charges as a percentage of own source revenue is 10.3%, which is below the Council approved policy of 12.5%, and below the provincial limit of 25%." It seems that this is conservative, and the City could increase debt even marginally to allocate more resources towards fighting climate change. We recommend that the City increase the debt up by 2.2%, to the upper limit of 12.5%, in order to invest more funds towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. The City could increase dept up 12.5% and still have debt of half the provincial limit.
- Additionally, we estimate that the draft budget includes <1% of spending to climate action expenditures -- in review against other Canadian jurisdictions, we believe that there is room in the budget for climate related investments (e.g. an analysis of Mississauga's budget shows nearly 5% of the budget being allocated for climate action).

- The City needs to ensure that it has a long term, holistic strategy in place with the budget to support it, and to recognize that short-term debt is appropriate to be used to put in place solutions to long-term sustainability issues. Not investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation today will end up costing the City even more in the future; therefore, we recommend that the City spend a dollar today to save two dollars down the line.

2. Allocate more funds and make a long-term commitment to fund climate action.

- Further to the previous point, the City needs to specify a budget to support long- term climate action (similar to the City of Mississauga). That budget should extend beyond the City's 2020 budget to ensure that it is consistent in approach and investment year-over-year. In order to make real progress to fight climate change, investments must be continuous, and strategic, and build on the investment from the years prior.
- We support the City's allocation of \$1,245,000 (\$920,558 after taking out the one-time costs) to address climate impacts, including \$124k for completing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan and supporting the Bay Area Climate Change partnership as well as \$200k to update the Urban Forestry Management Plan .We urge the City to allocate appropriate funds to complete a high quality climate change adaptation plan. Also, the City should consider committing to funding the BACCC long-term in a consistent and on-going basis.
- In addition, transit-related costs are the majority of the climate-related funding. We would like to ensure that these expenditures are not the business as usual expenditures if they are considered to be part of climate action. Although investing in transit is necessary and a vital component of a Climate Action Plan, it is not a sufficient response to the climate emergency or meet the City's GHG reductions targets.
- Similarly to the investment in public transit, the one-time funding allocated to the Urban Forest Management Plan, while necessary, on its own, is not a climate change strategy. Taking into consideration that the City will be voting on the Climate Action Plan in March, we would expect the 2020 budget to reflect significant allocation of funds toward the first phase of the implementation of that Plan.
- Mississauga's budget is 2-3 times that of Burlington's, yet their budget allocation dedicated to climate action is about 28 times Burlington's. For example, the City of Mississauga has pledged over \$450M over 10 years (2020-2029) towards climate action and adaptation.¹
- The City of Vancouver has a budget about six times the size of Burlington's, however, their budget allocation towards climate action is more than 40 times that of Burlington's.

Out of a \$1,624M operating and \$507M capital budget for 2020, the City of Vancouver is allocating at least \$30M to climate action-related initiatives:

- \$6.8M to accelerate action on climate change (including funding to support and encourage more zero emission building, continue tree planting to improve the forest canopy in an effort to combat climate change, address urban heat islands, and plan for a sea level rise challenge.
- \$14M for active transportation corridors.
- \$5M to accelerate transition of City owned vehicles to electric
- \$3.2M for park and street trees program
- \$1M for electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- Other significant investments related to parkland acquisition, flood mitigation as well as strengthening biodiversity

3. Investigate potential revenue opportunities to fund its climate action initiatives.

- As the City looks to act on its climate emergency declaration, it should consider looking at opportunities to raise revenue that can be earmarked directly for climate goals. For example, using a higher property tax surcharge to directly fund climate action.

Reviewing the proposed 2020 budget must go hand in hand with reviewing the proposed climate action plan. The plan identifies 23 actions spread over 7 programs that will reduce Burlington's carbon emissions and transition the community to net carbon neutrality. If the plan is approved and adopted by Council, a financial commitment must be reflected in the City's budget, both in the short term and the long term. Top priority picks for climate change investments should speak to curbing emissions from the largest emissions sectors. Recommendations for the buildings sector include providing incentives for developers that implement green standards in their buildings and advancing low carbon smart communities / projects, in addition to financing a deep retrofit program similar to Toronto's HELP program. Investment priorities in the transportation section include financing the expansion of transit services, electrifying urban transit and the municipal fleet and investing in charging infrastructure throughout the City. Additionally, investing in partnerships with environmental nonprofits and the business community will accelerate climate action and help to achieve the overarching target

In closing, we urge the City to act immediately on the declaration of a climate emergency. The climate emergency isn't unique to Burlington -- it is an emergency that exists all across the world, but nowhere is action as important as at home. In Burlington, we can take meaningful action today which will help to protect our citizens, not only for the rest of our lifetimes, but for

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our children and grandchildren as well. The City must have a holistic climate strategy, along with the appropriate long-term funding, put in place as soon as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed 2020 budget. We look forward to further collaboration on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Amy Schnurr
Executive Director
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association

¹ Committed amount estimated based on 10-year draft Climate Action Plan budget; see p. 113 of https://www7.mississauga.ca/documents/committees/general/2019/2019_12_04_General_Committee_Agenda.pdf