



Policy Development Committee Report

To: The Chair and Members of the Policy Development Committee
From: Adam Crozier, Director of Corporate Strategy
Date: November 5, 2024
Report #: RPT-422-24
Subject: Draft Strategic Plan Update
Purpose: For Information and Direction

Recommendation

Whereas Council approved its Strategic Plan – “Our Future Brant” in September 2019;

And Whereas following the commencement of the 2022-2026 term of County Council, it was resolved to undertake an update process to the existing Strategic Plan owing to the disruptions to business brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and a desire to maintain the priorities and directions contained in “Our Future Brant;”

And Whereas County staff have undertaken an engagement process with the public, Council, and senior staff in support of this refresh process highlighting a slight shift in the importance of certain priorities while maintaining a consistent overall focus;

Therefore, that staff report RPT-422-24 – Draft Strategic Plan Update be received as information;

That staff be directed to incorporate comments received on the draft Strategic Plan, its Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Actions, and revise into a final draft to be presented prior to the end of 2024.

Executive Summary

This report outlines suggested revisions and a refocusing of the County of Brant Strategic Plan, originally approved in September 2019. As many of the specific Actions outlined in the original Strategic Plan have been completed, new Actions are proposed. Following a period of public consultation, discussions with the County’s senior management, and a guided session with County Council, the Strategic Priorities have been shifted and amended to reflect a focus on financial and economic sustainability in the post-COVID-19 era. Further focused is placed on the pressures the County and the broader community is experiencing with increasing demands for residential housing development and housing affordability, an increased population - primarily in urban areas, the continued need for stable and responsive governance, and the addition of measures to reduce carbon emissions and to mitigate and adapt to increasing climate change.

Following a review period, staff intend to bring forward a final version with a time horizon to the spring of 2027 for Council’s consideration by the end of 2024.

Strategic Plan Priority

Strategic Priority 6 - Stable and Responsive Governance

Impacts and Mitigation

Social Impacts

The social impacts of the draft Strategic Plan are intended to be positive owing to the focused governance of the County towards the continued success of the County of Brant.

Environmental Impacts

The draft Strategic Plan proposes to include elements associated with the upcoming Climate Action Plan which intends to develop corporate and community-based priorities and actions to respond to County's declaration of a climate emergency, and the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Economic Impacts

The draft Strategic Plan intends to foster an environment of fiscal sustainability, economic development and economic competitiveness as these remain significant priorities to ensure the continued viability of the County of Brant as a whole.

Report

Background

In 2019 the County undertook a Strategic Planning process to replace the previous Key Strategic Priorities that Council and staff had followed since 2011, and the Community Vision Statement in place since 2013, and consolidate these values into a single document. In the first half of 2019, a robust public engagement process was undertaken to solicit the opinions of the public, and to determine the priorities of County Council. Adopted in September 2019, *Our Future Brant* contained 6 Strategic Priorities lead by the completion of major Plans and Studies to guide the County through a period of unprecedented growth pressures stretching beyond the original time horizon of the Strategic Plan.

Early in the term of Council elected in 2022, staff brought forward a process to revise the current Strategic Plan including a public survey, in person and virtual community open houses, and a guided session with Council to understand the community's focus in a post-COVID-19 perspective. These sessions were conducted during the first half of 2023 and further information is contained in the Analysis section of this report.

Analysis

Public Feedback and Council Review

In early 2023 the County undertook a public engagement period to seek the community's priorities and opinions. This included a survey hosted on EngageBrant, a virtual guided engagement session, and two Open Houses where residents could speak to County staff. A summary is included below of the top priorities, but strikingly many of the priorities from the 2019 engagement period continued to be a top priority.

Survey summary:

Top five (5) survey responses ranked as 'Very important' or 'Important' included:

1. Protecting green space, farmland and water (634 participants)

2. Learning more about the County's new Official Plan and Provincial policy directives that detail where and how growth will occur and what is protected (589 participants)
3. Ensuring the County of Brant implements best practices related to environmental sustainability and energy management (building design, facility upgrades, carbon neutral etc.) (511 participants)
4. Ensuring Burford, Paris, and St. George downtown cores are thriving and vibrant (498 participants)
5. Protecting heritage such as historical buildings, museums and cemeteries (485 participants)

In essence the protection of green space, farmland and water was consistently the dominant theme throughout the various types of engagements.

A Council session with Glenn Pothier of GLPi was held in late May 2023 to identify some of the common themes that Council had been addressing, with the recent election campaign highlighting the importance many of these issues. Importantly, the perspective of Council reflected the community's response to the public consultation period, albeit with the heightened responsibilities that come with making decisions that balance the needs and desires of all of the individuals and communities Council members represent. While naturally many of the same themes resulting from the public consultation period were presented during the Council session, 3 additional common themes were highlighted:

1. The challenges of decision making without a Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP)
2. The need to ensure the equitable/fair treatment of all residents and an equitable approach to decision making
3. Affordable housing and increasing housing options in various communities

Following the research phase of the Strategic Plan refresh process, it was acknowledged that preparing a revised Strategic Plan without the fiscal roadmap to guide future decision making was difficult. Originally, the completion of this process was deferred to follow the presentation of the LTFP and the completion of the 2024 Budget process, but many of the steps involved in operationalizing the LTFP and providing its true value to the decision-making process were not undertaken until 2024, with a finalized version expected in the coming month. With this enhanced certainty of the goals and projects to be undertaken over the next 2-3 years and a fiscal roadmap upcoming, staff have prepared a draft version of the refreshed Strategic Plan for Council's consideration and review.

Review of Status of Current Strategic Plan – 5 Years Later

While many of the Actions contained in the current Strategic Plan had a time horizon consistent with the 2018-2022 term of Council, the COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact on corporate operations. At various points work on specific actions halted as senior staff were tasked with managing the impacts of the emergency and ensuring the continuity of day-to-day operations in an environment where rules and regulations changed frequently. Further the general focus of the broader community tended to be on the emergency and ensuring resources directed towards the healthcare sector. Other items, such as the adoption and implementation of the County's new Official Plan intended to guide the growth and development of the County, were subject to the timelines of the Province.

That said, the vast majority of the specific actions identified in the current Strategic Plan have been fulfilled, and most notably, the County new Official Plan received Ministerial approval within the past month. Plans such as the Asset Management Plan and Transportation Master

Plan have been prepared and updated, a new Development Charges By-law has been approved, and most importantly, the Long-Term Financial Plan is nearing completion and ready to be integrated into all facets of County operations. As such, many of the proposed actions in this refreshed version highlight the integration or continued implementation of Plans proposed in the current Strategic Plan to fulfill the far-reaching goals set in 2019. An overview of the final status of these Actions is attached to this report.

Overview of Proposed Refresh

The main tenets of the Strategic Priorities remain consistent from the original Strategic Plan; however, based on conversations with the public, Council, and senior staff, the order of the Strategic Priorities has been amended, and in cases combined to highlight connections between themes in a broader sense. With the Long-Term Financial Plan's importance to the strategic principles and decision making process of Council, staff have prepared a draft refreshed Strategic Plan for Council's consideration, with the following Strategic Priorities and Goals reorganized to recognize current conditions:

1. **Economic and Financial Resilience** – Utilizing the Long-Term Financial Plan, ensure decisions are made with a broad economic and financial understanding to support County operations and the community at-large.
2. **Focused Growth and Infrastructure** – Guided by the new Official Plan, ensure that planning for growth is undertaken in a manner that is proactive and with the necessary infrastructure in place.
3. **Healthy, Safe, and Engaged Communities** – Ensure that the decision-making process is equitable to all residents and all communities and is communicated in an accountable and transparent manner.
4. **Stable and Responsive Governance** - Ensure the County has the financial, human, and physical resources required to deliver quality, reliable, transparent, and affordable public service to support the broader community.
5. **Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action** - Advance climate change mitigation and adaptation at the corporate and community level to support a resilient, sustainable future for all.

Outline of Strategic Priorities and Goals and Rationale for Major Revisions

Strategic Priority 1 – Economic and Financial Resilience

Focused primarily on the importance of the Long-Term Financial Plan to the future viability of the County of Brant both as a corporation and the community at large, the revised Strategic Priority 1 assumes much of the focus from the former Strategic Priority 3 (Economic Resilience), while further incorporating the Long-Term Financial Plan and Asset Management Plan to highlight that the decisions made at both the Council and staff level have major implications on the broader County. With escalating costs following both the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting 30-year high inflation numbers, the amount of funding required for both traditional service offerings and infrastructure projects, whether renewal or growth related, continue to place pressure on both the corporation and the broader community.

Recent increases to assessment (tax levy) and non-assessment (e.g. Development Charges) revenue sources have maintained service delivery and required capital projects, but these financial increases have consequences on the overall economic health of the community. Coupled with the finalization and incorporation into day-to-day County operations of the Long-

Term Financial Plan and the Asset Management Plan, the need to continue a focus on enabling economic development, large and small, remains the key element of the County's operations that enables the other Priorities to succeed and contributes to the overall vibrancy of the County.

Strategic Priority 2 - Focused Growth and Infrastructure

Comprising elements of the former Strategic Priority 1 and Strategic Priority 4, this Strategic Priority highlights that growth and development will continue to dominate much of the County's attention and focus over the coming years. With the final approval of the County's new Official Plan in October 2024, along with a heightened prioritization of new residential housing development from both the federal and provincial governments, planning for both land use and infrastructure development will be significant. Combining these Strategic Priorities together recognizes the shift in approach that is proposed by County staff towards the implementation of the new Official Plan to cohesively and strategically plan for the development, in a land use and infrastructure sense, that is expected in the County's urban areas in the coming years.

Strategic Priority 3 - Healthy, Safe, and Engaged Communities

Comprising elements of former Strategic Priority 3 and Strategic Priority 4, this Strategic Priority targets a focus on plans and priorities to ensure individual residents feel the County is a progressive, welcome, safe, and inclusive community for all, while respecting heritage aspects and rural and small urban character that is valued by residents. This further incorporates the means to ensure the broader community can connect to Council and its administration to be aware of the measures being undertaken to operate and better the broader community.

Strategic Priority 4 - Stable and Responsive Governance

In essence this Strategic Priority retains its focus and intention from the current Strategic Plan as it serves as the foundation of good governance and administration in the County of Brant.

Strategic Priority 5 - Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action

This Strategic Priority is the only addition to the Strategic Plan to recognize the importance of Council's declaration of a climate emergency in November 2019 following the approval of the current Strategic Plan, and the community's desire for action on climate change. The implementation of the upcoming Climate Action Plan will be the main focus of this Strategic Priority, including audits to better understand sources of corporate emissions, and the facilitation of an environmentally sustainable community.

Monitoring and Reporting

A weakness of the 2019-2023 Plan was inconsistent reporting on the accomplishments of the goals and actions of the Plan; that said, the Plan was adopted a mere 6 months prior to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and for the following 24 months, the primary focus of administering the County was related to the mitigation of the pandemic, with the declared state of emergency only lifted on March 1, 2022. As previously identified, the vast majority of the actions in this plan were completed by the end of 2022 despite the pandemic, and the remaining significant actions have been or are expected to be completed during the following 2-year period.

With the establishment of the Corporate Strategic Division within the Office of the CAO in 2023, a program of centralizing the reporting of significant County projects and initiatives has begun, enhancing the routine of reporting on major initiatives, and more importantly to this

project, monitoring the progression of the actions of the Strategic Plan through its time horizon. Staff are investigating the best methods to visualize and disseminate the progress of the Strategic Plan and its stated actions and will evaluate how best to report on this progress, either through quarterly, biannual, or annual reporting to the Policy Development Committee. Further, staff are working to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) from sources such as the World Council on City Data (WCCD) to correlate the County’s performance to other best practices.

Summary and Recommendations

As indicated above, many of the Plans and Projects identified as specific Actions in the current County Strategic Plan have been completed or are expected to be completed imminently. During the consultation period undertaken last year, the current priorities of both Council and the broader community remained consistent, and as such, only minor modifications are proposed, and which focus heavily on implementing and integrating major completed aspects such as the Long-Term Financial Plan and the newly approved Official Plan into County operations going forward.

This draft is presented for the review of Council, and staff intend to bring forward a final version based on this review by the end of 2024.

Attachments

- 1. Draft Strategic Priorities and Specific Actions
- 2. Final Review of Original Version of *Our Future Brant*

Reviewed By

Alison Newton, Chief Administrative Officer
Senior Management Team

Copied To

Halie Gilmore, Project Manager, Corporate Strategy

By-law and/or Agreement

By-law Required	No
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and /or Clerk	No