

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Community Strategic Plan

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: June 19, 2023

Report Number: CAO 18-23

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by:

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**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief
Administrative Officer**

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Council endorse the 2023-2026 Community Strategic Plan;
2. That staff be directed to report annually on the progress of the Community Strategic Plan; and,
3. That staff be directed to implement the Actions identified in the Community Strategic Plan by presenting the required budget annually and developing work plans accordingly.

2. Highlights:

- The development of a Community Strategic Plan has been identified as a top priority for Mayor and Council.
- Extensive community engagement was conducted through two phases between February and May. During this time, more than 8,500 visitors learned more about the Community Strategic Plan, and over 3,000 individuals took the time to provide feedback on their priorities and help shape the Community Strategic Plan. Community feedback was received through online surveys and in-person and virtual engagement sessions.
- The Community Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for how Town Council and staff will work together to deliver on community priorities over the next four years.

- The Plan includes measures of progress that will be reported annually to evaluate and transparently share progress.
- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the 2023-2026 Community Strategic Plan, which includes a Community Vision, Corporate Mission, Corporate Values, four Strategic Pillars, 13 Objectives, and 62 Actions.
- Many of the Actions require additional investment of staff resources, capital, and/or operating budgets. These initiatives will be brought forward for Council approval through the annual budget process.
- The Community Strategic Plan will replace the Corporate Strategic Plan and Business Plan and will guide annual Departmental work plans.

3. Background:

The Town of Whitby's last Community Strategic Plan was created in 2002. Since then, the community has grown substantially, numerous departmental strategies and plans have been developed, a Service Delivery Review was completed, and in 2019, Whitby developed its first Corporate Strategic Plan and Business Plan.

Strategic planning is one of the most essential tools a municipality can use to identify and bring together the objectives and needs of residents, members of Council, and municipal staff in the development of a shared vision, direction, and goals for a community. It also functions as a performance mechanism, allowing management and the public to evaluate progress and ensure that the municipality acts in a coordinated fashion.

The creation of a Community Strategic Plan was identified as a priority for the newly elected Council in October 2022. Since then, Council and Staff have been working together to create the four-year Community Strategic Plan and provide a roadmap for how, collectively, we will deliver on community priorities through service delivery.

The Community Strategic Plan was developed through an inclusive process, seeking input from Council, staff, and the community. In November 2022, a Steering Committee composed of staff, members of Council, and an external consultant was established to guide the creation of the Community Strategic Plan. In December 2022, a Council workshop was held to receive input into the creation of the Plan and ensure that priorities Council had heard were important to the community during their campaigns were captured for further community engagement. In February 2023, Phase One of community engagement was launched, informing a draft Community Strategic Plan which was presented to Council in April 2023. Phase Two of community engagement was launched in late April and concluded in May 2023.

From this feedback, staff made updates to the Community Strategic Plan and developed measures of progress for each Action. The final Plan is now being presented to Council for endorsement. The Plan will result in a transparent process of tracking and reporting on measurable accomplishments and progress with Council, staff, and the community. This Plan will replace the Corporate Strategic Plan and Business Plan and will guide Departmental annual work plans for this term of Council.

An overview of the process of developing the Community Strategic Plan appears below:



4. Discussion:

Building the Plan

The components of the Community Strategic Plan include a Community Vision, Corporate Mission, Corporate Values, Strategic Pillars, Objectives, Actions, and Measures of Progress. The development of each component was informed by the existing Corporate Strategic Plan, Business Plan, Council's priorities, and the feedback provided through extensive staff and community engagement.

To align the Community Strategic Plan with the current Corporate Strategic Plan, the Steering Committee recommends adopting the existing Corporate Mission and Values

into the Community Strategic Plan. The Corporate Mission and Values were developed after extensive staff consultation in 2019, were then reaffirmed through staff consultation in 2022, and have been instrumental in strengthening the corporate culture over the past four years. To maintain momentum, the following Corporate Mission and Values are being recommended to be adopted in the Community Strategic Plan:

Mission: Together, we deliver services that make a difference in our community.

Values: Collaborative, Accountable, Respectful, Engaged

Community Engagement

Feedback from residents, businesses, and community partners who call Whitby home was critical to developing a Community Strategic Plan that reflects community priorities. As such, a two-phased engagement plan was implemented and rolled out from February to May 2023. This was supported and promoted through a sustained and multi-channel communications strategy that aimed to reach a wide variety of internal and external audiences, including residents, businesses, community partners, and Town staff.

Phase One – Community Engagement

The first phase of engagement took place through an online survey hosted on Connect Whitby. The survey was open from February 21 to March 12, 2023, and 2,195 submissions were received. This is one of the highest levels of community engagement experienced to date by the Town.

In the survey, participants were asked to provide some demographic information, help inform the creation of a Vision statement, validate the proposed Strategic Pillars, and prioritize a list of action items under each Strategic Pillar. The Phase One survey results were fully reported in the [April 2023 Draft Community Strategic Plan Report to Council](#). Attachment 2 provides an infographic summary, and Attachment 4 includes a detailed overview of the Phase One survey results.

Phase Two – Community Engagement

Phase Two of community engagement consisted of an online survey on Connect Whitby from April 27 to May 19, 2023. In-person engagement sessions with specific sessions focusing on the public, businesses, staff, and partners, as well as virtual engagement sessions for the public and staff, and one-on-one sessions with Council members were also conducted in May 2023. This phase of community engagement focused on validating the Vision, Objectives, and Actions while identifying gaps to inform the development of the final Community Strategic Plan.

Attachment 3 provides an infographic summary of the results of the Phase Two survey, while Attachment 4 provides a more fulsome report that also includes what was heard through both the virtual and in-person engagement sessions. The following is a high-level summary:

Phase Two – Survey Results

Demographics

- 838 respondents
- 71% live in Whitby, and 20% live and work in Whitby
- 64% have lived in Whitby for more than 10 years
- 80% of respondents are between the ages of 35-74

Vision

- 86% strongly or somewhat agree that the Community Vision reflects what Whitby should aspire to.

Objectives

The percentage of participants who either strongly agree or agree that the Objectives under each of the following Strategic Pillars reflect the priorities of the community are as follows:

- Pillar 1: Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Healthy and Inclusive
 - Improve community health, wellness, and safety (93%)
 - Provide equitable access to municipal services and programming (86%)
 - Increase opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of the community (68%)
- Pillar 2: Whitby's Natural & Built Environment – Connected and Resilient
 - Enhance community connectivity and beautification (93%)
 - Invest in infrastructure and assets (86%)
 - Demonstrate environmental leadership in sustainability and addressing climate change (79%)
- Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy – Innovative and Competitive
 - Support economic growth and job creation (89%)
 - Attract and retain businesses and industry (89%)
 - Promote innovation and build competitive advantage (81%)
- Pillar 4: Whitby's Government – Responsive and Responsible
 - Ensure fiscal accountability and responsibly plan for growth (91%)
 - Deliver exceptional customer service and community engagement (91%)
 - Address community needs through collaboration and strategic partnerships (87%)
 - Be the organization that people want to join and build their future (83%)

Phase Two – Engagement Session Results

In total, 77 individuals participated in eight (8) engagement sessions.

This includes five (5) in-person sessions:

- business community
- partners
- Town of Whitby staff
- Two (2) with the community

And three (3) virtual sessions:

- Town of Whitby staff
- two (2) with the community

Each in-person and virtual session provided attendees with an opportunity to learn about the strategic planning process and the details of the draft Community Strategic Plan. The sessions provided a forum to ask questions and seek feedback on the Vision, Objectives, and Actions in addition to seeking feedback on the recommended frequency, format, and level of detail desired for reporting. The in-person sessions provided the opportunity to spend more time with a focused group of individuals, enabling insightful, fulsome, and meaningful conversations and connections, resulting in additional quality feedback being collected.

The following is a high-level summary of the feedback received through the engagement sessions:

Vision: Naturally beautiful green spaces, a vibrant waterfront, thriving downtowns, and a safe community – the heart of Durham Region, a destination to explore.

- Overall, there is strong support for the Vision; however, it currently focuses too much on tourism and needs to emphasize that Whitby is a great place to live and work.

Pillar 1: Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Healthy and Inclusive

- Community safety is pivotal.
- Addressing emerging social needs such as homelessness should be enhanced.
- Increased focus on accessibility is recommended.

Pillar 2: Whitby's Natural & Built Environment – Connected and Resilient

- Increased focus on traffic and active transportation is recommended.
- Access to parks and green space are of utmost importance; opportunities to connect existing and currently underutilized open space areas should be a priority.
- Focus should be on the revitalization of existing facilities and assets.

Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy – Innovative and Competitive

- Increased focus on tourism and economic development opportunities at the waterfront is a priority.
- Downtown redevelopment and support for our two unique downtowns should be increased.
- Further definition of the key economic sectors of focus for Whitby is recommended, including concentration on the green economy.

Pillar 4: Whitby's Government – Responsible and Responsible

- Focus on enhancing partnerships overall, with specific mention of post-secondary institutions.
- An accountable government is important.
- Community engagement needs to be more of a priority.

Recommended Final Community Strategic Plan (see Attachment 1)

Feedback collected has played a pivotal role in shaping the final recommended Community Strategic Plan. Several changes have been made to the plan to reflect the valuable input and recommendations from the community survey, the business community, partners, Town staff, Council, and community members.

To address the feedback that the Vision Statement needs to focus on Whitby as a great place to live, work, and visit, the proposed Community Vision is as follows:

Community Vision: Whitby – naturally beautiful green spaces, a vibrant waterfront, thriving downtowns, and a safe community – the heart of Durham Region, an exceptional place to live, work, and explore.

Two of the Strategic Pillars were modified slightly, with the word “Safe” being added to Pillar 1 and the word “Accountable” replacing “Responsible” in Pillar 4. The four (4) proposed Strategic Pillars are as follows:

Pillar 1: Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Safe, Healthy, & Inclusive

Pillar 2: Whitby's Natural & Built Environment – Connected & Resilient

Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy – Innovative & Competitive

Pillar 4: Whitby's Government – Accountable & Responsive

Several updates were also made to the Objectives to address feedback. For example, in Strategic Pillar 1, “safety” was enhanced in the first objective and “accessibility” was added to the second objective.

Numerous modifications were also made to the Actions to reflect the feedback received, address any gaps identified, and ensure they are clear, measurable, and achievable. For example, the Action related to maintaining and enhancing parks, trails, tree canopy, and green spaces was expanded to include identifying opportunities to connect existing and currently underutilized open space areas. As another example, an Action related to community engagement was added to better reflect Council's commitment to engaging the community. In addition, the Action focusing on homelessness was reworded to increase clarity and ability to measure progress.

A staff member was identified as a lead for each Action and assisted in developing the Measures of Progress to define what success looks like and determine what the Town will be reporting on through the term of Council and lifecycle of the Plan. Staff also identified where Actions are a new initiative and where they will require incremental budget related to additional staff resources, capital budget, and/or operating budget over the four-year term.

Of the 62 Actions, 11 (or 18%) are new initiatives, and the balance of the Actions are already identified in departmental work plans. Regarding budgets, only 23 (or 37%) of the Actions are currently funded, with the balance requiring additional investment over the four-year term.

Reporting

In the Phase One engagement, the highest prioritized action under the Government Pillar was committing to transparent and timely reporting to the community. During the Phase Two engagement sessions, participants were asked for feedback on their desired frequency, format, and level of detail of reporting back to the community on the progress of the Community Strategic Plan. Regarding frequency, most individuals recommended a formal annual report with opportunities throughout the year to highlight progress at events, speaking engagements with Mayor and Council, and meetings, such as Ward Town Halls. Most identified a preference to have reporting done at the Action level.

Related to the reporting format, various options were recommended, including a formal Council report, sharing on the Town of Whitby website, and through current communication methods (i.e., The Whitby Perspective, e-newsletters, social media, and paid media). Internally, staff recommended providing updates through the intranet and through regularly scheduled meetings (i.e., Town Halls, People Leader updates, and Departmental meetings).

Public-facing dashboards can help communicate and build trust through openness and transparency. The implementation of an interactive dashboard where individuals can receive up-to-date, detailed information on the progress of each Action was generally supported. However, the financial impact would need to be analyzed to ensure the value of the investment in staff time and technology infrastructure.

Staff recommend proceeding with an annual report in December 2023, December 2024, December 2025, and June 2026. This report would highlight accomplishments for each Strategic Pillar and provide updates on progress at the Action level. The annual report will also provide opportunities to provide information on why certain Actions may not be on track or why certain measures of progress are not achieved. This may be due to a lack of financial resources, changes in legislation, decisions of partners, or other circumstances which would be outlined in the annual report. The annual progress of the Community Strategic Plan would be shared and promoted through various methods, as outlined above. Staff will report on the benefits and costs of implementing an interactive dashboard solution for Council's consideration in 2024.

5. Financial Considerations

A capital budget of \$54,127 (capital project # 50237002 Whitby Community Strategic Plan) was approved in the 2023 Budget for the development of the Community Strategic Plan. This budget covered the costs associated with the consultant, advertising and promotion of engagement opportunities, the creation of the Community Strategic Plan document, and related signage in Town facilities.

There are 62 Actions identified to move forward and realize the Community Strategic Plan. Currently, 39 of the 62 Actions will require Council approval of additional funding in future budgets to implement. That is additional capital investments, staff resources, and/or other operating budgets.

A high-level estimate of the incremental financial investment to implement the Community Strategic Plan is approximately \$200 million. However, a few large projects/initiatives were anticipated prior to the Community Strategic Plan engagement process and account for most of these costs, such as future funding for the Whitby Sports Complex, Zero Carbon projects, implementation of market compensation review, and purchasing property for a hospital.

Staff will bring forward the incremental costs to support projects and initiatives to advance the priorities of the Community Strategic Plan for Council's consideration through Staff Reports and the Town's annual budget process. If the funding is not secured, implementation of certain components of the Plan may be deferred. Deferral of Actions, if any, will be communicated in the annual reporting for the Community Strategic Plan.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Public and staff engagement was a priority in developing the Community Strategic Plan. In February, a two-phased engagement strategy was launched to solicit residents, businesses, partners, and Town staff input. A phased and multi-channel internal and external communications plan was developed to promote this opportunity for staff and the community to have their say through earned, owned, and paid channels. Key external communications tactics included videos from Mayor Roy, a community-wide mail-out, Curbex signage in the community, facility signage, earned media coverage, digital advertising, display ads, partner outreach, and more. Internally, the surveys and participation opportunities were promoted to staff through emails from the Mayor and CAO, the intranet, message boards, and more. In-person and virtual engagement sessions were also offered to staff and community members, and the surveys and engagement sessions were shared with all Advisory Boards and Committees.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

The Community Strategic Plan Steering Committee includes staff from Strategic Initiatives, Communications & Creative Services, and Technology & Innovation Services. Staff from across the organization were encouraged to participate in the Surveys, and an in-person and virtual staff workshop was held during Phase Two. Staff from across the corporation who were identified as the lead on Actions were engaged to develop Measures of Progress and identify if the initiative was incremental to their work plan and budget.

8. Strategic Priorities:

The development of the Community Strategic Plan establishes the Strategic Priorities for the organization. As such, the Corporate Strategic Plan, Departmental Strategies, and Master Plans were considered in creating the Plan to ensure alignment. In addition, accessibility and sustainability are identified as priorities in the Objectives and Actions. Following approval of the Community Strategic Plan, this section of the report template will be updated, requiring all future Staff Reports to identify how they support and align with the Community Strategic Plan.

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1 – 2023 - 2026 Community Strategic Plan

Attachment 2 – Phase 1 Survey Results Infographic

Attachment 3 – Phase 2 Engagement Results Infographic

Attachment 4 – Engagement Summary Report