



Corporate Report

NO: R209

COUNCIL DATE: Sept 17, 2007

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: September 10, 2007
FROM: General Manager, Planning and Development FILE: 6950-30 (Sustainability Planning Initiatives)
SUBJECT: Proposed British Columbia Climate Action Charter

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Authorize the Mayor or a designate of the Mayor to sign on behalf of the City of Surrey the proposed "British Columbia's Climate Action Charter" document, attached as Appendix I, subject to a minor amendment to the wording of clause (5)(a)(i) by replacing the word "being" at the start of the clause with the words "exercising best efforts to be" so that the clause reads as follows:

“(i) exercising best efforts to be carbon neutral in respect of their operations by 2012, recognizing that solid waste facilities regulated under the Environmental Management Act are not included in operations for the purpose of this Charter.”; and
3. Authorize the Mayor to forward a letter to the Premier and appropriate Provincial Ministers advising that the City of Surrey will be signing the British Columbia Climate Action Charter on the understanding that the Province:
 - will show leadership in areas under its direct jurisdiction, such as Building Code requirements and providing financial incentives for transit, energy efficiency measures, alternative energy sources and green buildings and infrastructure;
 - will move quickly to provide sufficient resources to municipalities to complete their Climate Change Action Plans under the Federation of Canadian Municipalities ("FCM") Partners for Climate Change program, including support for an emissions inventory and the development of easy-to-apply business cases for potential greenhouse gas reduction measures;

- acknowledge that municipalities have different characteristics and that their ability to introduce measures to reduce greenhouse gases in areas such as land use, transportation and other areas of jurisdiction will vary according to their individual circumstances; and
- acknowledge that progress towards carbon neutrality will depend on available resources and an analysis of the costs involved, as determined by a common definition of neutrality, a provincially supported emissions inventory and commonly accepted carbon offset values.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to advise Council about an invitation from the UBCM (see Appendix I) to the City of Surrey to “sign on” to a proposed “Climate Action Charter for British Columbia” and to make recommendations for Council consideration with regard to the proposed Climate Action Charter.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Council has passed several resolutions in the past decade supporting action to be taken to address climate change, including:

- Support for the FCM Municipal Leaders' Resolution On Climate Change;
- City participation in the FCM Partners for Climate Protection ("PCP") program; and
- Membership in the FCM 20% Club, a group of municipal and regional governments across Canada working together to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they produce.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the potential consequences of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, both locally and globally.

While the response to climate change issues has sometimes been seen as the responsibility of federal, provincial and regional transportation agencies, local governments have an important role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Municipal roles can include planning for compact land use and alternative transportation modes that reduce dependence on private automobiles, promoting green buildings and alternative energy systems and setting an example for the community by their own corporate practices.

Under the FCM's PCP program, members are assisted in addressing these roles through a five milestone process to create and implement corporate and community greenhouse gas reduction action plans, starting with Milestone One, which is an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions. As with many other PCP members, the City has not yet been able to complete the process, due, in part, to the resources needed to complete the inventory of greenhouse gases and to prepare and implement action plans. The GVRD Regional

Engineers Advisory Committee's Climate Protection Subcommittee noted in a 2006 report that "accessing senior government financial and technical support in order to complete action plans is very challenging".

The City of Surrey has, nevertheless, initiated a number of measures independently, including the initiation of a bicycle network, provision of infrastructure for public transit, planning for more compact communities in new Neighbourhood Concept Plans ("NCPs") and town centre areas, and undertaking energy audits and upgrades of municipal buildings.

In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the provincial government announced that it would be undertaking a series of initiatives, in addition to the BC Energy Plan, to address climate change. Funding for these initiatives is anticipated once the province's "Climate Action Team" identifies the Province's priorities. In support of this process, the UBCM's executive has been working with the Premier and Ida Chong, Minister of Community Services, to draft a "Climate Action Charter". The intent of the Charter is to outline the roles of provincial and local governments, propose initial strategies for local governments to implement and create a framework for a joint BC-UBCM Green Communities Committee to develop a range of actions and support mechanisms to address climate change issues. On September 6, 2007, the City received correspondence from the President of UBCM, regarding the proposed BC Climate Action Charter (copy attached as Appendix I). The proposed Charter will be presented at the upcoming UBCM Convention and municipalities will be invited to sign on at that time.

DISCUSSION

The proposed Climate Action Charter is a document whose signatories include the Province of BC, UBCM and signatory local governments. While the proposed Charter states that it is "...not intended to be legally binding or impose legal obligations on any party", the parties who sign the agreement would be expected to share common goals in making efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. Specifically, local governments who are signatories to the agreement would agree to develop strategies and take actions to achieve the following goals:

- (a) carbon neutrality in respect of their internal operations by 2012, with the exception of solid waste facilities;
- (b) measuring and reporting on their community's greenhouse gas emissions profile; and
- (c) creating complete, compact, more energy efficient rural and urban communities (e.g., foster a built environment that supports a reduction in car dependency and energy use, establish policies and processes that support fast tracking of green development projects, adopt zoning practices that encourage land use patterns that increase density and reduce sprawl).

The Climate Action Charter acknowledges that major changes are happening to our climate, that human caused greenhouse gases are a significant contributor to climate change and that climate change has serious consequences for British Columbians.

The Climate Action Charter maintains that the Province and municipalities both have important roles to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that each level of government must work cooperatively, exchange information and must act decisively within its legislated mandates and spheres of influence to reduce greenhouse gases. A joint Provincial-UBCM Green Communities Committee and Working Groups will be established to identify and remove barriers and to create policies and practices that support greenhouse gas reduction measures.

The City of Surrey has also started the process of developing a "Sustainability Charter". As part of that process, strategies will be proposed for Council's consideration as they relate to actions on climate change and greenhouse gases reduction.

Carbon Neutrality by 2012

Carbon neutrality by 2012 would mean that the City would need to reduce its effective greenhouse gas emissions from its operations other than solid waste facilities over the next five years. Due to considerable investments in current facilities and equipment that have a life span beyond 2012, carbon neutrality would possibly not be achievable in the time frame proposed.

As with other municipalities, Surrey's main sources of greenhouse gases from operations are from buildings and the corporate vehicle fleet, with some contributions from solid and liquid waste streams. City buildings have been upgraded for lighting, heating and insulation, but these improvements are not to the level required to be carbon neutral. As a motor vehicle's life is up to 10 years and building life can exceed 50 years, existing buildings and infrastructure will not all be replaced by 2012. However, the City can install energy efficiency features during major upgrades and for the City's vehicle fleet to be upgraded to the most fuel-efficient vehicles available by 2012. An employee trip reduction program is in effect but could be enhanced which could further reduce emissions due to commuting to and from work.

Saanich has undertaken work in the area of being carbon neutral. Saanich has created a local fund to undertake projects that reduce CO₂. If the corporate emission numbers cited by Saanich to achieve carbon neutrality for its internal operations were extrapolated for Surrey, which has approximately four times Saanich's population, Surrey's offset costs at the current rate of \$20 per ton would be in the order of \$500,000 per year. This assumes that Surrey would also implement additional greenhouse gas reduction measures similar to those that Saanich has implemented, including greening the fleet, building upgrades and an enhanced employee trip reduction program. The City would have to complete a corporate greenhouse gas inventory before the required carbon offsets could be calculated more accurately. The cost could also increase if the current rate of offsets was increased from \$20 per ton, as some analysts are now saying that the actual cost of offsets should be closer to \$100 per ton.

Complete and Energy Efficient Communities

A principle strategy that municipalities are asked to support in the Climate Action Charter is the creation of complete, compact, more energy efficient communities that reduce car dependency, promote green development projects and adopt zoning practices that encourage land use patterns that increase density and reduce sprawl. While Surrey is

taking a number of significant steps in this direction, through the creation of small lots, intensification in the City Centre and Town Centre areas and new NCPs which support these principles, the strategy may be difficult to fully achieve in the short term, given the demand for, and the large supply of available land zoned for single family housing in the City. Surrey's current ratio of higher density multi-family housing units to single family detached houses is 1:1. The regional average is 4:1; however, this year to date data based on building permits issued is showing a ratio of 3:1 which is taking Surrey towards the regional average as the trend continues. A strong commitment would be required to focus a greater proportion of the City's growth into more compact, complete, walking, cycling and transit-oriented neighbourhoods.

The Provincial Role

The Climate Action Charter, while identifying a number of areas where the Province and municipalities can work collaboratively together over time to reduce greenhouse gases, and specific short-term greenhouse reduction strategies that municipalities can begin to implement, does not identify specific strategies for the Province to implement in the short-term. Instead, the Province and the UBCM state that they will "support local governments in pursuing these goals". Two specific areas where provincial commitments would be appropriate for the achievement of the goals of the Climate Action Charter include:

- The Province should show strong leadership in areas under their direct jurisdiction, such as Building Code requirements and providing financial incentives for transit, energy efficiency measures, alternative energy sources and green buildings and infrastructure; and
- The Province should move quickly to provide significant resources to municipalities to complete their Climate Change Action Plans under the FCM PCP program, including support for an emissions inventory and the development of easy-to-apply business cases for potential greenhouse gas reduction measures.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that, while some laypersons and a very small number of scientists are not convinced that human activity is a significant contributor to climate change or that there will be serious consequences, the majority of the world's experts on climate science are convinced about climate change, the causes and the potential impacts. Under these circumstances, the "precautionary principle" is usually applied as a risk management strategy by prominent environmental organizations such as Environment Canada, which supports the policy that "the absence of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason to postpone decisions when faced with the threat of serious or irreversible harm".

The proposed Climate Action Charter for British Columbia recognizes the importance of climate change and the need for the Province and municipalities to work together to implement a comprehensive package of measures to reduce greenhouse gases.

The Climate Action Charter's proposed strategies are supportable. Further, it is noted that the Charter is non-binding (i.e., not a legal agreement but more of a "letter of intent"). Based on the above discussion it is recommended that Council:

- Authorize the Mayor or a designate of the Mayor to sign on behalf of the City of Surrey the proposed "British Columbia's Climate Action Charter" document, attached as Appendix I, subject to a minor amendment to the wording of clause (5)(a)(i) by replacing the word "being" at the start of the clause with the words "exercising best efforts to be" so that the clause reads as follows:

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Jean Lamontagne
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Planning and Development

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Attachment:

Appendix I Communication from UBCM including the Proposed British Columbia's Climate Action Charter