

Figure 1

2020 Intergovernmental Relations Strategic Framework

Introduction and Context

The City of Guelph's (the City) 2020 Intergovernmental Relations Strategic Framework (IG Strategy) seeks to guide the City's intergovernmental and advocacy activities for the rest of Council's term.

As a mature local government, the City has a vested interest in leveraging intergovernmental relations to work collaboratively with the federal and provincial governments as well as regional partners, local stakeholders and municipal associations. Doing so enables the City to influence key government decision-making, including on policies and funding that would impact the City, and to advance the City's ambitions as a growing, innovative and future-ready municipality and community. Strategically engaging in intergovernmental relations to advance local priorities will also ensure the City is well positioned to address emerging and existing challenges and opportunities facing municipal governments province-wide.

Notably, this document aligns the City's advocacy priorities with the priorities of the City's Strategic Plan "[Guelph. Future Ready.](#)" and ensures the City's intergovernmental advocacy strategically supports community goals as articulated in "[A United Vision: Guelph's Community Plan.](#)"

Opportunities

Key opportunities for the City of Guelph include leveraging its reputation as an innovative, community-oriented and trusted local government partner focused on efficient service-delivery and ensuring future-readiness. Guelph's strategic location in the heart of Ontario's innovation corridor, status as a regional agricultural hub, strong manufacturing and business sectors, post-secondary institutions, growth potential, access to nature and historically low levels of unemployment also mark the community as a City on the rise. As a mid-sized city, one of Guelph's key value adds is its ability to serve as a testing community to pilot new, innovative, inclusive and green approaches to city-building.

Another advantage for the City is the strength of its relationships with key local partners. Engagement with these partners, including the University of Guelph, Conestoga College, the Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Guelph, key manufacturing companies like Linamar, and local community-serving organizations, amongst others, can strengthen the City's advocacy efforts with the provincial and federal governments.

From an intergovernmental relations standpoint, the City's close proximity to Queen's Park and the accessibility of transportation options to other destinations also serves as an opportunity to leverage strategic outreach to advance local priorities.

Challenges

Significant challenges facing the City include the COVID-19 pandemic, a somewhat unstable political environment and longstanding fiscal sustainability challenges that effect not only Guelph but municipalities across Ontario.

The current public health crisis has exposed service gaps and numerous vulnerabilities in our local community and economy. Strategic effort will be necessary to ensure an inclusive and green social and economic recovery from the pandemic and its associated economic impacts. Further to engaging with provincial and federal counterparts, this will require that the City work closely with the County of Wellington as a key partner and our local consolidated municipal service manager. The City will also need to work strategically with local industry and businesses.

Politically, the reality of a minority federal government and an anticipated provincial election before the end of Council's term requires a focus on election readiness. Similarly, the pandemic has highlighted challenges in Canada's intergovernmental framework vis a vis the provinces and municipal governments. Federal and provincial leadership and collaboration is essential on numerous files, including infrastructure and climate change, but hampered by political divisions and municipal governments' status as "creatures of the province." This leads to an uneven intergovernmental framework that fails to capture the prominence of modern-day cities and necessitates an advocacy approach that emphasizes intergovernmental collaboration, speed and evidence-based decision-making. It also highlights the importance of advancing the City's reputation as a trusted government partner and municipal thought leader.

Financial sustainability and the infrastructure backlog remain long-standing risks to the City as well as municipalities province-wide. The COVID-19 pandemic has fully exposed these sustainability challenges. In the years ahead, federal and provincial leadership in providing emergency municipal relief will be imperative until the pandemic subsides and until reform can address these longstanding revenue sustainability challenges.

The City of Guelph's Intergovernmental Relations Strategic Framework

Goal and Areas of Focus

The City of Guelph successfully leverages local, regional, provincial and federal partnerships to create a future ready and innovative community for all.



Objectives and Proposed Activities

Promote: Elevate the City’s reputation as a ‘future ready’ thought leader, innovator, trusted government partner and responsible local government.

Actions under this area of activity include:

- Celebrating the City’s successes by seeking out opportunities to promote our future readiness as a public policy thought leader and innovative service provider, and
- Expanding the City’s influence through participation in federal and provincial working groups, task forces and in municipal associations.

Advocate: Influence decision-makers to advance the City’s strategic interests and the wellbeing of our local community.

Actions under this area of activity include:

- Identifying and creating annual and ad-hoc advocacy priorities and action plans in line with the priorities of the City’s Strategic Plan to advance the City’s interests (i.e. annual advocacy action plans, election action plans, etc.),
- Establishing and implementing an annual outreach approach to engage federal, provincial and regional decision-makers on key local issues, including through in-person or virtual “Guelph Advocacy Days”, “three-levels” meetings with the Mayor/MP/MPP, and outreach with regional partners,
- Coordinating the City’s response to provincial and federal consultations,
- Providing intergovernmental advocacy advice and support to Council and City Staff as requested where aligned with the City’s priorities, and
- Supporting the preparation and promotion of strategic funding opportunities.

Engage: Nurture relationships with other orders of government, municipal partners, associations and key community stakeholders to create broad-based support for our story, our priorities, challenges and ambitions.

Actions under this area of activity include:

- Identifying and nurturing strategic partnerships with government, regional, association and local partners,
- Collaborating with key local stakeholders to implement community-based advocacy in support of Guelph's Community Plan, and
- Supporting Council and staff leads serving in key municipal associations (i.e. Ontario's Big City Mayors, Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, etc.).

Inform: Provide strategic information and advice to city leaders on the latest legislative and policy developments and challenges of the day.

Proposed actions under this area of activity include:

- Developing, implementing and maintaining an Intergovernmental Relations Communications Plan to keep Council, City Staff and the public informed and engaged about the City's advocacy and intergovernmental activities,
- Providing Council and City leaders with timely analysis of emerging legislative and policy developments of the day (i.e. Intergovernmental Updates, Info Reports, Consultation Submissions), and
- Working cross-departmentally to research and analyze emerging challenges and opportunities facing the City and providing strategic policy advice as needed.

Conclusion

Developing, maintaining and implementing a dedicated Intergovernmental Relations Strategic Framework will ensure the City is well-prepared to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise. Leveraging its intergovernmental relations capacity, the City can build on its reputation as an innovative, inclusive, future-ready and trusted order of government. Working collaboratively with government partners will also ensure the City is able to meet and exceed the vision set out in the City's Strategic Plan and in the Community Plan.