

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Tuesday, January 14, 2025
Subject	Future in Focus: Guelph's Advocacy Plan

Recommendation

1. That Future in Focus: Guelph's Advocacy Plan be approved.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To present Future in Focus: Guelph's Advocacy Plan (the Advocacy Plan) which sets out a renewed and strategic approach to the City's advocacy efforts. The Advocacy Plan was developed with input from City Council and City leadership, and will enable a consistent and focused approach to advocacy which will support the City in advancing the four themes of the Future Guelph Strategic Plan.

Key Findings

The City of Guelph, along with many other municipalities, is facing an increasing amount of complex issues which require intergovernmental collaboration to come to a solution. With limited opportunities to directly communicate with decision-makers, and a wide range of voices and perspectives on various issues, it is essential to have a consistent and strategic approach to the City's advocacy.

The Advocacy Plan is a key initiative under the Future Guelph Strategic Plan which will set out a renewed and strategic approach to the City's advocacy work that is necessary to elevate Guelph's voice in the coming years. The Advocacy Plan aims to maximize the impacts of the City's advocacy efforts, facilitate a united Guelph voice, provide transparency, and enable improved advocacy prioritization and work planning.

Developed through extensive engagement with City Council and City leadership, the Advocacy Plan supports these objectives by setting out a consistent process for identifying and prioritizing key issues, and for selecting appropriate advocacy tactics. The plan also sets out the general themes for advocacy required to support the strategic themes of Future Guelph, providing a roadmap for the City's advocacy in the coming years. The Advocacy Plan is provided in Attachment-1 Future in Focus: Advocacy Plan 2025-2027.

Following the approval of the Advocacy Plan, the Policy and Intergovernmental Services division will plan and undertake advocacy activities, as informed by the Advocacy Plan processes and principles. Progress updates will be provided as part of annual strategic plan reporting, and more detailed updates to the Mayor and Committee Chairs may be provided at key points.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The Advocacy Plan and the related advocacy work are in alignment with the Future Guelph Strategic Plan, and fulfil the strategic plan initiative of “develop(ing) an advocacy strategy aligned to the strategic plan’s priorities”.

Future Guelph Theme

Foundations

Future Guelph Objectives

Foundations: Advocate for our city

Financial Implications

None.

Report

Purpose and Objectives

As a key initiative under the Future Guelph Strategic Plan, the Advocacy Plan was developed to support the following objectives:

1. Maximize impacts of advocacy
2. Create a united Guelph voice on advocacy issues
3. Provide increased transparency on advocacy activities
4. Facilitate proactive and prioritized advocacy work planning

These objectives were identified in response to the challenges associated with a rising volume and complexity of issues facing the City that require advocacy. As the City seeks collaboration and support from other levels of government, it is essential to effectively leverage limited engagement opportunities with decision makers to maximize advocacy impacts, and to avoid Guelph’s voice being overlooked.

Additionally, with a diversity of voices and perspectives from Council, City leadership, community and staff, it is necessary to combine these perspectives into a united voice for the City to put forward strong and consistent messaging.

Achieving the objectives above is important to ensure that the City’s advocacy is impactful, consistent, and reflects a united Guelph perspective.

The Advocacy Plan supports these objectives by setting out a strategic process and identifying the key themes and directions for advocacy required to support the City’s strategic plan objectives. Using this process and direction, staff will be able to consistently and objectively identify, prioritize and action advocacy on specific issues in a way that is transparent to the organization and the public.

Engagement Process

To support the objective of creating a united Guelph voice, the Advocacy Plan was developed with input and engagement from across the organization. Both senior staff and members of City Council were engaged to ensure that the Advocacy Plan reflects their perspectives as subject matter experts, decision makers and public representatives respectively.

In the first phase of engagement throughout April and May 2024, the Policy and Intergovernmental Relations division (project team) conducted group interviews

with the Leadership Teams (LTs) of the City's four service areas. The purpose of these sessions was to better understand the scope and priority level of issues requiring advocacy across the organization. LT members were asked to identify the issues within their purview that require advocacy, the specific outcomes that the City is seeking, any community or professional organizations sharing advocacy goals with the City, and a self-assessed priority level of the issue.

As an outcome of the first phase of engagement, the project team identified the key areas of focus for the City's advocacy, including the specific issues under each theme, potential stakeholders, and their relative priority levels. This input also supported the development of an advocacy issue prioritization framework by providing context on the types of advocacy required for various issues, and factors affecting their relative priority.

In the second phase of engagement in October 2024, the project team engaged the Mayor and Council through individual online surveys. The purpose of this engagement was to confirm and receive additional context on the key areas of focus and specific issues, and to seek feedback on potential future resources to support members of City Council in advancing the City's advocacy priorities. Through this engagement, the project team was able to refine the key areas of focus to include Council's perspectives, refine the advocacy issue prioritization framework, and expand on the potential tactics which are reflected in the Advocacy Plan.

Advocacy Plan

Informed by the extensive internal engagement process, the Advocacy Plan, included as Attachment-1 was developed to set out a renewed and strategic approach to the City's advocacy work. The key components of the Advocacy Plan include the following:

1. **Objectives and Approach:** a statement of the goals, purpose, and vision for the Advocacy Plan. This component outlines the need for and vision for successful advocacy by the City, and is intended to create a shared understanding of advocacy across the organization.
2. **Advocacy Process:** this component forms the core of the Advocacy Plan, and describes the process for developing an advocacy topic and advocating on specific issues. The process is intended to provide consistent guidance to staff, and is split into four steps:
 - **Issue Identification:** this section outlines the process used to identify advocacy issues and to define the associated outcomes and calls to action. This section also sets out the scope of the issues on which the City advocates, to create a shared understanding of the role and limitations of the City's advocacy function.
 - **Stakeholder Identification:** this section describes the types of external stakeholders which the City may engage on advocacy issues, and defines the roles and relationships of these stakeholders with respect to the City. Importantly, this section provides a framework for understanding the City's potential advocacy partners, and the ways in which the City may engage with these partners to amplify its voice.

- **Issue Prioritization:** this section provides an overview of the advocacy issue prioritization framework used by the Policy and Intergovernmental Services division to evaluate specific advocacy issues. This section describes the criteria used for evaluating and prioritizing issues, the specific priority categories, and the relationship between priority category and the overall level of advocacy effort for any given issue.
 - **Tactic Selection:** this section outlines the advocacy tactics that may be used by the City, and the key considerations that guide their selection. Importantly, this section also describes the different types of outcomes that the City may be seeking from advocacy on any given issue, and identifies the appropriate types of tactics and level of effort that are most effective to achieve these outcomes.
3. **Key Advocacy Directions:** this component identifies the overarching advocacy topics that are required to support Future Guelph strategic themes. This component is a direct product of the internal engagement process, and sets a direction for current and future advocacy. To provide additional context, Attachment-2 contains a snapshot of the specific advocacy issues included under each overarching advocacy theme at the time of the publishing of this report. This snapshot represents the active issues identified as of the time of writing (December 2024), and the issues, outcomes and priority levels in this document will change and evolve over time.
 4. **Implementation and Evaluation:** this component outlines the specific activities that will support the achievement of the Plan’s objectives, and sets out the approach to evaluating the success of the City’s advocacy efforts.

Taken together, the components of the Advocacy Plan provide a strategic approach and general direction for the City’s advocacy in the coming years. Following the approval of the Advocacy Plan at City Council, the Policy and Intergovernmental Services division will plan and action advocacy efforts on key issues as informed by the processes set out in this plan, and continue to undertake regular engagement to maintain an understanding of key advocacy issues.

Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation is critical to ensure that the actions undertaken are having the desired impacts. Regularly evaluating performance helps to ensure transparency and accountability in the City’s advocacy efforts, and to facilitate continuous improvement as progress is achieved and lessons learned. As advocacy efforts seek impacts that are measured over a long horizon, and the ultimate outcomes are often outside the control of the City, annual performance measurement often uses key performance indicators (KPIs) based on inputs and outputs. While these KPIs make it challenging to attribute specific advocacy efforts to ultimate decisions and notable change, they are an important tool for monitoring the progress of campaigns and city-wide efforts.

To measure the activities and efforts planned as part of the implementation of the Advocacy Plan, the Policy and Intergovernmental Services division will build on the existing Intergovernmental Performance Management Index. This index has been used to measure advocacy efforts since 2022, and was developed based on the goals and actions set out in the City’s [2020 Intergovernmental Relations Strategic Framework](#). This existing index uses a weighted methodology for each KPI which is

evaluated against a pre-set target to arrive at a combined overall intergovernmental percentage out of 100. A sample of the current performance index, including the associated goals and select actions, is provided in Table 1 below.

Given the Advocacy Plan sets the direction for an improved advocacy approach and tactics, this existing index will be revised to reflect the enhanced activities that are anticipated as part of the development of specific advocacy work planning. With an increase in targeted engagement and outreach, the team will continue to seek continuous improvement in our performance approach by integrating outcome-based measures wherever possible. This performance reporting will help the team continue to evaluate tactics, impacts and overall effectiveness to continuously seek opportunities adjust approaches and improve performance.

Staff will continue to provide updates on the enhanced Intergovernmental Performance Index score as part of the annual Strategic Plan performance reporting.

Table 1 - Sample Intergovernmental Performance Measurement Index 2022

Goal	Sample Action	Sample Performance Metric
Promote	Expanding the City’s influence through participation in federal and provincial working groups, task forces and in municipal associations	Number of intergovernmental meetings hosted/coordinated by Guelph with municipal counterparts
Advocate	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	Number of high-level intergovernmental meetings advancing advocacy priorities and other advocacy directions set by Council (i.e. Ministerial/Chief/ADM+)
Engage	Identifying and nurturing strategic partnerships with government, regional, association and local partners	Number of joint advocacy letters
Inform	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)	Number of IG-led updates, briefing notes, info and council reports on policy or legislative developments

Financial Implications

None.

Consultations and Engagement

The Future in Focus Advocacy Plan was developed in consultation with the following internal groups:

- Mayor and Council
- Leadership Team
- Strategic Communications and Community Engagement

Attachments

Attachment-1 Future in Focus - Guelph's Advocacy Plan

Attachment-2 December 2024 Advocacy Issues and Outcomes Snapshot

Attachment-3 Future in Focus - Guelph's Advocacy Plan Presentation

Departmental Approval

Kim Krawczyk, Manager, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations

Report Author

Ilya Spivak, Intergovernmental Advisor, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations

This report was approved by:

Jodie Sales

General Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Intergovernmental Services

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 3617

jodie.sales@guelph.ca

This report was recommended by:

Tara Baker

Chief Administrative Officer

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 2221

tara.baker@guelph.ca