

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, May 6, 2025
Subject	Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action

Recommendation

1. That Council receive the Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action report
 2. That Council approve staff actions to support the community in taking collective climate action as described in Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To present the attached Guelph's Community Call To Climate Action (refer to Attachment-1 and Attachment-2) which provides key focus areas and priority climate actions to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions throughout the community that work towards Guelph's Community Race to Zero targets.

Key Findings

- In December 2021, Council declared support for the Cities Race to Zero campaign which sets 2030 and 2050 community-wide GHG emissions targets.
- There has been modest progress in managing community GHG emissions with the most recent data presenting an 8.2 per cent reduction in 2023 per capita emissions compared to the 2018 data. This falls short of straight-line interpolation of the Race To Zero (RTZ) target, which suggests that by 2023 a 26.3 per cent per-capita reduction is where emissions should be.
- Considering the projected new building construction and forecasted population growth, the 2030 target relates to a sustained emissions reduction of approximately 500,000 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent).
- Since community GHG emissions are released by all sectors in Guelph, more focused and meaningful action by all members of the community is urgently required.
- Priority climate actions that will achieve rapid emissions reduction have been derived from the sector breakdown of community GHG emissions.
- Through the priority climate actions, collectively 500,000 tCO₂e emissions can be reduced by the different sectors in the community and the 2030 RTZ target achieved.
- The Corporation of the City of Guelph recognizes that it is part of the Guelph community and has a key role to play, however there are limitations to what the

Corporation can directly control with regards to community energy use and community GHG emissions.

- The Corporation is looking to work with the community, as a member of the community, to bring greater focus on Community Climate Action and collectively answer the call towards the Race To Zero goals.

Strategic Plan Alignment

Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action encourages collective action in the community towards the Race To Zero goals by detailing key focus areas and priority climate actions to reduce GHG emissions throughout the community.

Future Guelph Theme

Environment

Future Guelph Objectives

Environment: Empower the community to help create a sustainable city

Financial Implications

The Community Call to Climate Action defines key focus areas and priority climate actions that need to be taken on by members across different sectors in the community, including the Corporation of the City of Guelph.

Corporate initiatives that support the community in the Race To Zero and Community Call to Climate Action are part of departmental workplans using staff resources and existing approved funding.

The Corporate Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan will be presented separately to Council later this year and will provide an update on municipal operating GHG emissions along with reduction strategies.

Report

The City of Guelph acknowledged the climate crisis in 2019. Since then, community climate change targets have been set as part of the United Nations' Race To Zero campaign (RTZ), which is intended to gather leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, and investors to reduce global carbon emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The RTZ targets are as follows:

- 63 per cent reduction in per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions against the 2018 baseline by 2030,
- reduce emissions further to be a net zero carbon community by 2050.

Considering the projected new building construction and forecasted population growth, the 2030 target relates to a sustained emissions reduction of approximately 500,000 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent).

There has been modest progress in managing community GHG emissions. The most recent data (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2) presents an 8.2 per cent reduction in 2023 per capita emissions when compared to the 2018 baseline. This falls short of where GHG emissions should be (using a straight-line interpolation of the 2030 RTZ target suggests 26.3 per cent per-capita reduction). This leaves little time to make major reductions to meet the 2030 RTZ targets. More focused and meaningful action by all members of the community is required immediately.

Figure 1: RTZ target progress graph (per capita emissions over the years with where the reductions should be as per RTZ 2030 target)

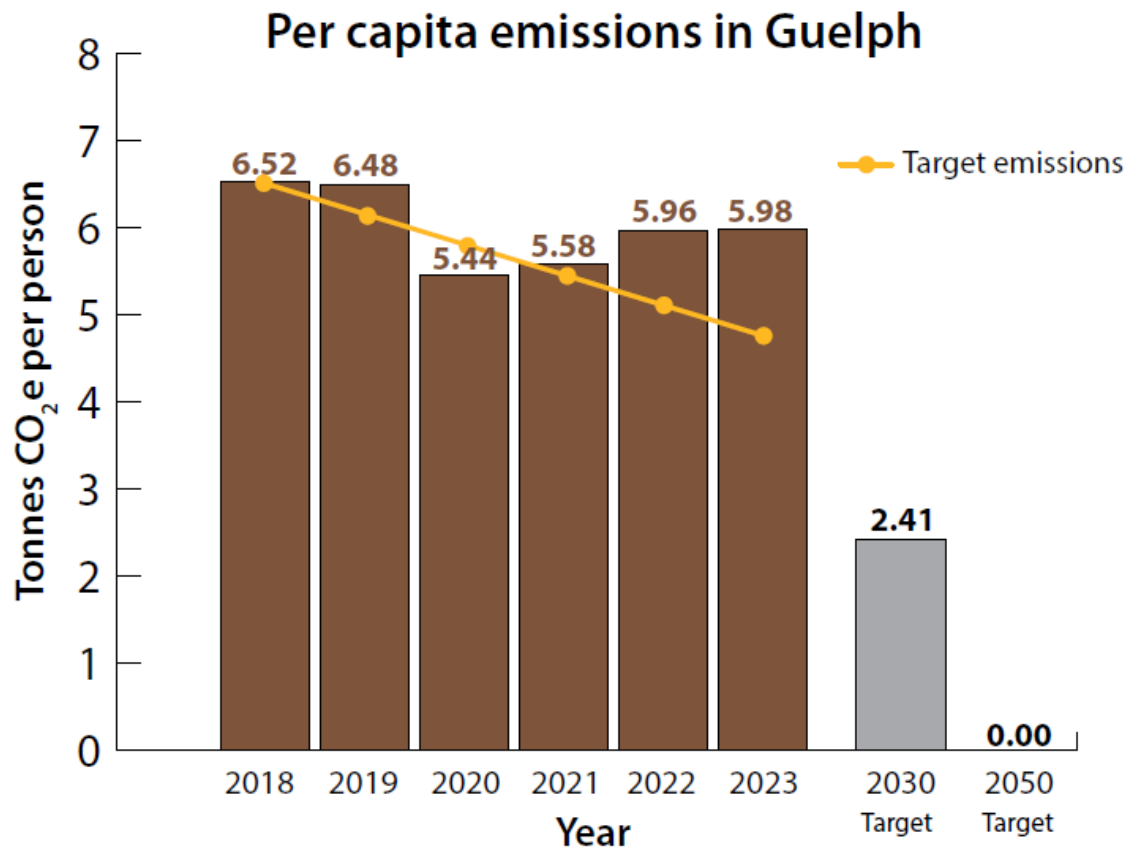
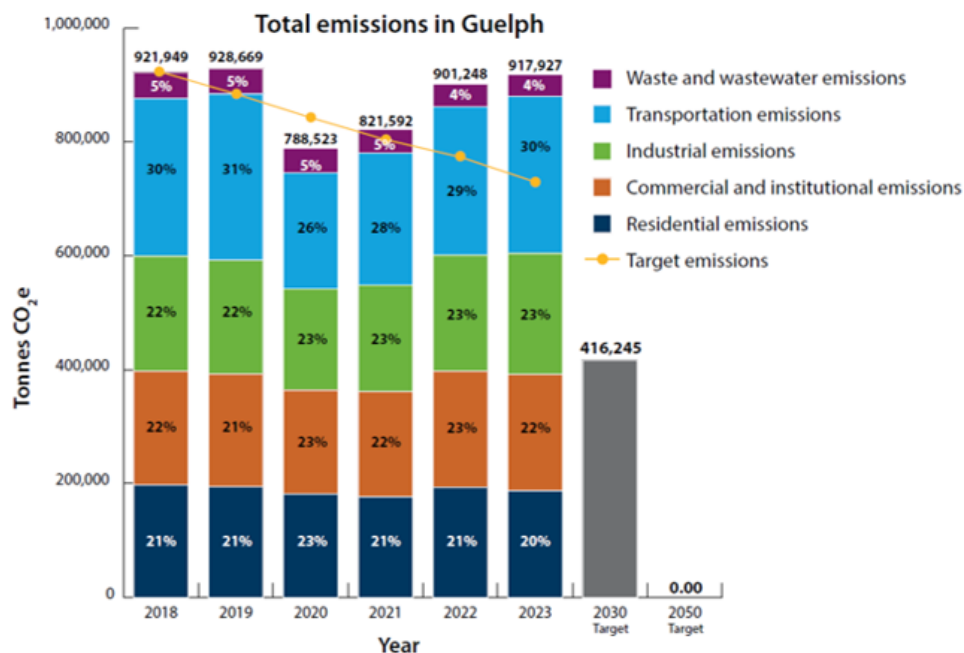


Figure 2: Total community emissions over the years (show contribution from different sectors for each year 2018 to 2023)

Total emissions



Community Call to Climate Action

As seen in Error! Reference source not found., community GHG emissions are released by all sectors in Guelph. In summary, everyone has a role to play, whether you live, study, work, visit, move around, and/or consume in Guelph. Therefore, the only way to respond to the climate crisis and meet our RTZ emissions targets is with collective action by all in the community.

Key focus areas to reduce community emissions

Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action lists the comprehensive areas where community emissions can be reduced by conserving energy and eliminating the use of fossil fuels:

- **Energy efficient and low-carbon buildings**
 - Transition building heating systems to recover waste heat and use energy efficient heat pumps
 - Carry out deep energy retrofits for existing buildings
 - Make new buildings more energy efficient and meet standards for low-carbon design
- **Decarbonized business operations**
 - Reduce energy consumption and reduce fossil fuel use by industrial, commercial, and institutional businesses in their operations
- **Renewable energy**
 - Increase solar generation on buildings and parking lots
 - Explore large-scale renewable energy projects within Guelph
- **Sustainable transportation**
 - Expand the network of safe and accessible streets and trails to promote walking, cycling and rolling
 - Advance local and inter-regional transit options as a viable alternative to personal automobile use
 - Adopt more electric vehicles
- **Circular economy**
 - Reduce waste by consuming less and sharing and reusing more
 - Use low embodied carbon construction
 - Recover energy from waste
- **Natural environment**
 - Preserve greenspaces by increasing densification and mixed-use neighbourhoods where residents can live, work and play
 - Protect and expand carbon sequestration through trees, wetlands, soils, and other nature-based solutions

Priority Climate Actions

Emissions can be reduced by the community in practical ways. Priority climate actions that will achieve rapid emissions reduction have been derived from the sector breakdown of community GHG emissions and the key focus areas:

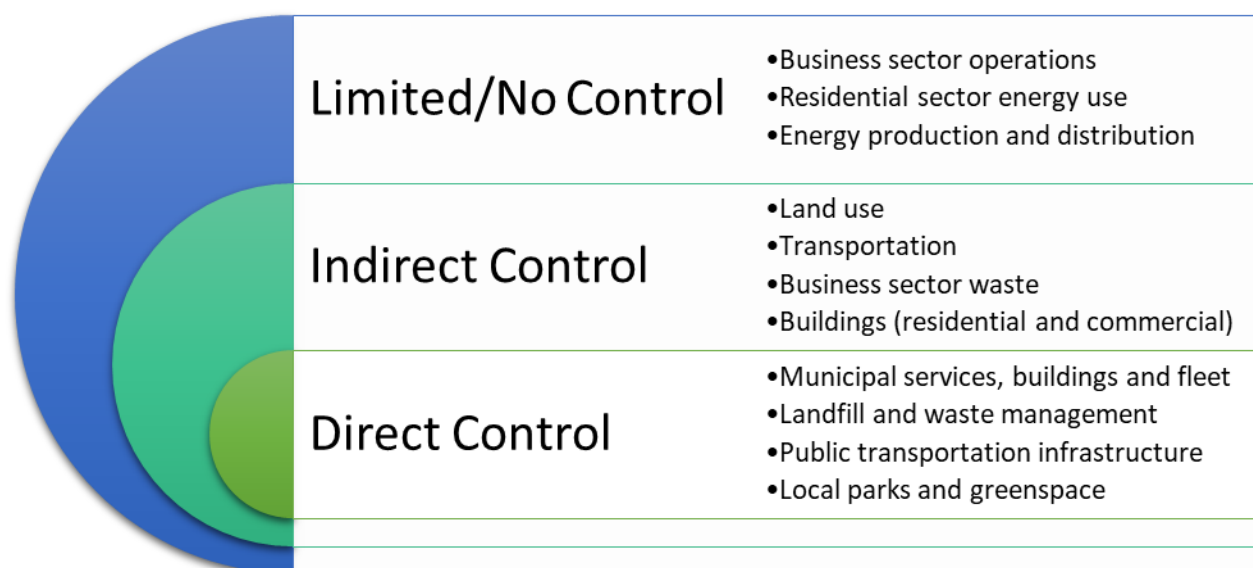
- **Homeowners:** Have 40,000 homes in Guelph change their heating systems to low carbon heat pumps
- **Builders and Developers:** Design and build all new buildings that are more energy efficient and be net zero carbon
- **Companies:**
 - All industrial companies in Guelph must work together and focus resources to reduce sector emissions by 100,000 tCO₂e
 - All commercial and institutional companies in Guelph must work together and focus resources to reduce sector emissions by 100,000 tCO₂e
- **Vehicle owners:** Replace 60,000 internal combustion vehicles with sustainable travel modes or electric vehicles
- **City:** Manage and maintain fugitive emissions from waste management and wastewater treatment to reduce emissions by 30,000 tCO₂e

Through these priority climate actions, collectively 500,000 tCO₂e of emissions can be reduced by the different sectors in the community and the 2030 RTZ target achieved.

How the Corporation supports the Race To Zero and the Community Call to Climate Action

The Corporation of the City of Guelph recognizes that it is part of the Guelph community and has a key role to play. There are limitations to what the Corporation can directly control with regards to community energy use and GHG emissions. Refer to **Error! Reference source not found.**, adapted from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), indicating the areas where municipalities can typically influence community emissions.

Figure 3: Municipal spheres of influence over different sources of GHG emissions (adapted from [Federation of Canadian Municipalities Factsheet: Municipal governance for deep decarbonization](#))



Understanding where the Corporation can effectively contribute helps to determine where it can continue and further focus efforts to provide meaningful support to the community in taking climate action.

Community supporting efforts by the Corporation include:

- **Collecting emissions data, tracking progress and reporting** – the Corporation collects energy and emissions data for the community and analyzes this data using the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#) to form the community GHG inventory. Inventories are performed on an annual basis and reported on the [Energy and Climate Change webpage](#) on Guelph.ca and the [Carbon Disclosure Project](#) (CDP). This is critical for tracking ongoing progress and identifying areas for the community to work on.
- **Partnering with community groups and environmental non-profits** – Guelph has strong environmental advocates through several environmentally focused community groups. They are trusted community resources for information on climate action and on practitioners that affect climate action. The Corporation works with different groups on their projects with the aim to share information and updates on municipal climate initiatives, while gaining insights from community group perspectives that can be factored into designing and implementing initiatives.
- **Enabling household efficiency upgrades and lowering energy costs** – the Guelph Greener Homes program offers interest free loans and low-income qualified grants to residential property owners in Guelph to do energy efficiency upgrades in their homes. This financial support helps homeowners overcome barriers by addressing cashflow concerns and making energy upgrades more affordable. Since the program launched on July 31, 2023, there have been more than 700 program registrants with over 250 completed projects, achieving a GHG reduction of approximately 400 tCO₂e.
- **Empowering youth to be climate leaders** – the [Youth Climate Action Fund](#) (YCAF) has supported climate initiatives designed and led by Guelph youth (aged 15-24). Overall, the project had 84 youth in leadership roles, 415 active youth participants in project activities, and 1,461 youth impacted by the project. With the success of the initial YCAF round, an additional \$120,000 has been granted to the City for the second phase of the program to extend the call for applications and support more youth-led climate initiatives.
- **Working alongside industrial, commercial, and institutional (ICI) partners** – in November 2024, over 70 representatives from Guelph businesses, local utilities, and the public sector gathered at the Guelph Local Stocktake on Climate – ICI Summit, to track progress against the RTZ targets. This was the first of an annual workshop event where information on energy efficiency programs and industry case studies were shared to build knowledge, strengthen connections amongst peers, and identify opportunities and barriers to climate action in the ICI sector so that more can be achieved.
- **Strengthening climate awareness and promoting activation in the community** – continuing to build climate change awareness and converting awareness to action is needed throughout the community. The Corporation works at this through several ways:

- Meeting people where they are, by connecting with community at places like workplaces, stores, schools, community centres, neighbourhood events, and fairs.
- Partnering and hosting community education and activation events such as [Clean and Green](#), [Healthy Landscapes](#), community tree planting, and [site tours](#) at the Waste Resource Innovation Centre or the Water Resource Recovery Centre. Collectively, over the nearly 100 events in 2024, more than 10,000 active participants rolled up their sleeves or learned first-hand how major infrastructure works to protect the environment.
- Leveraging the [Ecochallenge.org](#) platform to inform, entertain, and motivate the community on ways to drive sustainable habits and measure collective climate action in the community. The [Guelph Ecochallenge](#) had its first event in April 2025 having more than 100 people join in.
- **Using policy to guide climate action throughout the community** – the Corporation sets policy such as master plans, bylaws, and guidelines. Many of these policies weave in climate action to support services today and as Guelph grows. Examples are seen through the energy sustainability sections of the [Official Plan](#) and masterplans for infrastructure and services throughout the community (for example the [One Canopy Strategy](#), [Guelph Transit Future Ready Action Plan](#), [Wastewater Treatment and Biosolids Management Master Plan](#), etc.). New policies are also developed to adapt to the changes and ensure the community grows in an environmentally responsible way. Work is currently underway on a green development standard that will guide the sustainable design of new developments.
- **Investing in reliable infrastructure to help the community be more sustainable** – the Corporation manages and maintains public infrastructure that is key to supporting the community reduce GHG emissions.
 - Expanding the 153 km cycling network to get around the city
 - Preventing fugitive emissions from the Eastview landfill, organic waste, and wastewater treatment processing
 - Moving people with public transit, while increasing access through mobility services and free ride programs
 - Operating a public use electric vehicle charger network with 30 chargers at 10 different locations across the city
- **Shedding light on energy access and poverty challenges in Guelph** – estimates suggest 20 per cent of households in Guelph are vulnerable to energy poverty ([Efficiency Canada](#), 2016). Energy poverty is associated with negative health outcomes, as affected households may struggle to heat and cool their homes and power lights and appliances. Higher rates of energy poverty are likely to be experienced by newcomers, seniors, renters, single parent households, and other traditionally marginalized communities. The City of Guelph, Guelph Lab, and researchers from the University of Guelph and University of Toronto, are working collaboratively to engage the community and characterize energy poverty within Guelph, determine its impacts, and recommend actions to improve long-term energy affordability and reduce energy vulnerability for Guelph's equity-deserving communities.

Next Steps

Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action is included as Attachment-1 Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action and is a critical reshaping of the conversation on climate change for the community to take collective action. The Community Call to Climate Action lists key focus areas and priority climate actions that everyone in the community can work towards. Refer to Attachment-2 Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action – Backgrounder for background information that provides helpful context for Community Climate Action. Communication strategies will be designed and deployed to socialize the Community Call to Climate Action and mobilize community members in Guelph.

The Corporation has added staff resources to the Energy and Climate Change team so the team can continue to provide community supporting efforts and continuously evaluate where community supports can go further. Overall, the Corporation is always looking to work with the community, as part of the community, to bring greater focus on Community Climate Action and collectively answer the call towards the 2030 and 2050 Race To Zero goals.

Financial Implications

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Consultations and Engagement

The Community Call to Climate Action builds on past community energy plans and is informed by data and community insights gained from various connections through the many community supporting efforts by the Corporation.

Corporate departments have been consulted for the preparation of the Community Call to Climate Action and include Engineering and Transportation Services, Environmental Services, Parks, and Planning and Building Services.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action

Attachment-2 Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action – Backgrounder

Attachment-3 Guelph's Community Call to Climate Action – Staff Presentation

Departmental Approval

None

Report Author

Bryan Ho-Yan, MASc, P.Eng., CEM, Manager, Energy and Climate Change

This report was approved by:

Antti Vilkkö, P.Eng., MBA
General Manager, Facilities and Energy Management
Infrastructure, Development and Environment
519-822-1260 extension 2490
antti.vilkko@guelph.ca

This report was recommended by:

Jayne Holmes, P.Eng., PMP
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Infrastructure, Development and Environment
519-822-1260 extension 2248
jayne.holmes@guelph.ca