



Staff Report

Operations – Sustainability & Solid Waste

Report To: COW-Operations_Planning_and_Development_Services
Meeting Date: October 8, 2024
Report Number: CSOPS.24.069
Title: Green Economy Hub Support
Prepared by: Nicholas Cloet, Sustainability Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CSOPS.24.069, entitled “Green Economy Hub Support”;

AND THAT Council endorse the allocation of \$3,500 from the Town’s 2024 sustainability budget to the Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT) Green Economy Hub pilot project, which will explore a business model and engage businesses and other organizations in The Blue Mountains alongside other Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County communities.

B. Overview

Bold Action 13 in The Blue Mountains Future Story includes Key Steps for Town staff to support development of a regional Green Economy Hub. Town staff have provided support to a regional collaboration of partners, including but not limited, to the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay, Grey County, and Collingwood Climate Action Team, to initialize a Green Economy Hub following a well-known model being propagated in communities across Canada by the not-for-profit organization Green Economy Canada. A financial contribution from the Town will assist the pilot stage of a Green Economy Hub for the Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County region.

C. Background

The Blue Mountains Future Story (TBM Future Story) focuses on several pillars of sustainability, organized into six Goal areas including: the Natural Environment; the Built Environment; Economy; Community and Culture; Social Well-Being; and Governance. TBM Future Story’s goals include thriving local businesses led by innovators committed to natural, economic and social prosperity.

TBM Future Story includes Bold Action 13: Establish/support a green economy task force to identify economic opportunities in the community. This Bold Action includes several Key Steps that ask Town Staff to work with local and regional partners to understand and collaborate on green economy priorities, and includes specific direction to collaborate on a Green Economy

Hub initiative for the Southern Georgian Bay region with the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay and other local/regional partners and green economy stakeholders.

A Green Economy Hub creates an environment where businesses and other organizations can learn how to address their environmental or social impacts, learning from each other and subject matter experts, and receiving support from the Hub organization to set targets and take action. Typical services of a Green Economy Hub include:

- Personalized guidance and resources to help organizations set sustainability targets and goals;
- One-on-one support to keep sustainability champions on track and working towards their organization's goals;
- Support to measure organizational carbon footprint, preparation of a GHG report and training for the organization's team;
- Local events or webinars offering learning and networking opportunities;
- Opportunities to access funding, awards/recognition, be featured in media articles, etc.

Benefits to Green Economy Hub participants can include:

- Improved operational efficiencies and reduced costs, particularly through reduced energy consumption;
- Enhancing brand reputation and public recognition for progress and successes
- Increased market competitiveness by attracting eco-conscious customers and differentiating from non-members;
- Employee engagement and retention with a culture of sustainability, and with training and development opportunities for staff;
- Community impact and presence through participation in local sustainability efforts, and networking opportunities for like-minded local leaders.

The Institute hosted several speakers with knowledge on Green Economy Hubs and green business practices in 2022 and 2023 webinars, building regional interest to learn more about what a Green Economy Hub might look like in the Southern Georgian Bay area. Town staff helped the Institute plan a September 2023 live event to convene local and regional stakeholders and discuss models of collaboration, including the potential need for a new organization, round-table or working group on sustainability (inspired by Bold Action 18: Establish a community sustainability organization/network to champion sustainability efforts in the community), as well as the Green Economy Hub model (Bold Action 13), and other potential ways to support collaboration on sustainability issues. The result of this workshop was an explicit lack of interest to form a new community sustainability organization or task force with a broad mandate, and very specific interest from participants to explore a Green Economy Hub model to build capacity among businesses and other organizations.

With the interest of regional stakeholders confirmed, the first annual The Blue Mountains and Area Sustainability Summit, hosted by the Town on April 25, 2024, provided an opportunity for the Town to further support the Green Economy Hub initiative. A presentation before lunch by Rosalyn Morrison with the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay provided some detail on the pilot

Green Economy Hub concept, and the afternoon featured a presentation by the Executive Director of Green Economy Canada, Priyanka Lloyd, who explained the Green Economy Hub model to attendees in more detail and proposed a pilot hub model that might be suitable to the Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County area. The Town provided a short survey allowing participants to express interest in learning more about a Green Economy Hub.

The Summit presentations were preceded by months of collaboration between Town staff and a group of stakeholders organized by the Institute. This group assisted the Town in organizing the afternoon content and included partners such as:

- Blue Mountain Resort
- Collingwood Climate Action Team
- Climate Action Now Network
- Georgian Bay Forever
- Grey County
- Town of Collingwood
- Wasaga Beach Climate Action Team.

A Green Economy Hub needs a strong not-for-profit organization to act as the host, providing staff resourcing to coordinate the program. Catherine Daw, Board Chair of the Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT), proposed to the CCAT Board that their organization could host the Green Economy Hub and explore a pilot program focusing on the Southern Georgian Bay area, and the CCAT Board of Directors unanimously voted to take on this responsibility. Grey County's Manager Climate Change Initiatives, Rebecca Danard, has experience founding and operating a Green Economy Hub in Sudbury and on behalf of the County has also provided advice and assistance in the early stages of hub development with the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay, CCAT, and Green Economy Canada, with the goal to include the remainder of Grey County in the pilot. These partners have prepared budget materials and a business plan, which are summarized in the Analysis section.

The Green Economy Hub pilot aims to include two cohorts of participants of between 8 and 12 participants each, with up to 20 total organizations to be engaged. Attachment 1 includes an overview of the rationale and work plan for the Green Economy Hub pilot project, prepared by Collingwood Climate Action Team, the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay, and Grey County staff. More information on how to register for the first cohort of the Green Economy Hub pilot program is available at: <https://www.collingwoodclimateaction.com/gechubpilot>

D. Analysis

The following tables summarize the current and anticipated revenues and expenses to be incurred for a successful initial pilot launch in March 2025. Funding this initiative is a dynamic situation as philanthropic contributions and external funding are being sought and anticipated expenses may be further refined by project partners. The following proposed budget focuses specifically on the first of two anticipated cohorts of local and regional participants.

Sources of Revenue 2024	Amount	Notes
Institute for Southern Georgian Bay	\$ 15,000	Confirmed
Local philanthropic organization	\$ 5,000	Tentative
Town of The Blue Mountains	\$ 3,500	Tentative – pending Town Council decision
Town of Collingwood	\$ 5,000	Tentative
Grey County	\$ 5,000	Tentative – pending County decision
TOTAL	\$ 33,500	

Expenses 2024 – March 2025	Amount	Notes
Business engagement (staff time)	\$ 9,000	~120 contract hours, September - December 2024
Business development events	\$ 5,000	4 events, one in The Blue Mountains, others in Collingwood, Wasaga Beach and Owen Sound
CCAT admin support (website, comms, admin)	\$ 6,000	\$600/month June 2024 - March 2025
Strategic support from Green Economy Canada	\$ 12,500	One third of the total fee for service to support development of a Green Economy Hub organization for full period ending in December 2025
TOTAL	\$ 32,500	

CCAT is asking municipalities to contribute \$5,000 to support this pilot initiative. Bold Action 13 in TBM Future Story directs that staff offer support to a regional Green Economy Hub, and so it is recommended that the Town provide monetary support to CCAT for the Green Economy Hub pilot program. The Sustainability budget can be tapped to provide \$3,500 in direct support in the 2024 fiscal year. Council may wish to consider if additional funding can be provided from another source to increase the Town’s contribution in 2024 to the \$5,000 desired by CCAT. Staff also propose that \$5,000 be included to support the Green Economy Hub pilot initiative as part of the 2025 budget process, provided recruitment for the second pilot phase of the program moves forward after March 2025.

The budget is in a draft stage and may change as additional information on revenue and expenditures develops. Additional funding from the Town may be requested at a later date to support future cohorts and other project activities. Information on the second pilot cohort budget will be reviewed by staff prior to allocating any funding reserved for this initiative as part of the 2025 Sustainability budget.

Membership fees are an important part of medium- and long-term sustainability for a Green Economy Hub. Hub organizations must establish membership fees at levels that allow them to maintain or build the organization and deliver a desired level of service for their membership’s unique needs; however, for the pilot phase with CCAT, Green Economy Canada is providing

program services to members and will retain membership fees. These membership fees will be partially subsidized by Green Economy Canada for smaller organizations, not-for-profits and charities with a 50% discount up to \$1,000. Annual membership fees for Green Economy Canada's program normally range between \$1,000 and \$6,000 depending on the organization's size and chosen membership track – the 'Insight' track provides a gentler introduction with training and GHG reduction support and is more affordable, whereas the 'Lead' track provides more comprehensive guidance for organizations to explore more significant changes and seek recognition for leadership in organizational sustainability. The Insight and Lead tracks are both available to participants in the pilot program.

After the pilot program completes, CCAT and its partners will determine if they can roll out a dedicated regional program with service delivery provided by CCAT and supported by Green Economy Canada. This newly formed Green Economy Hub would continue to provide resources and advice to member businesses and other organization types.

Additional sources of revenue that could assist in both the pilot program and in future program development include event sponsorships, government or other third-party grants, philanthropic contributions, and partnerships with Chambers of Commerce or similar organizations that engage with local business communities.

A multi-sector advisory group will help guide development of the Green Economy Hub pilot program. Town staff will have the opportunity to participate on this advisory group to provide the following types of assistance:

- Seek funding opportunities or other resources to support the pilot program;
- Background support to CCAT during the project to build awareness and champion the cohort opportunity with potential membership;
- Help with identifying potential businesses and other contacts within The Blue Mountains, such as BIA/associations, Chamber of Commerce, and specific business and organizational relationships;
- Advise on regional/local context of needs, businesses, organizations and other potential local supporters.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

Green Economy Hubs provide guidance and support to help businesses and other organizations reduce their environmental impacts, typically working with those looking to save money and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the energy and fuel consumption associated with their buildings or operations. A key activity for most Green Economy Hubs is to help member organizations identify priorities, set appropriate targets and take actions to achieve their sustainability goals. Green Economy Hubs can also support organizations in setting and achieving water efficiency or waste reduction targets, developing sustainable procurement policies/practices, and more as determined by local needs and within the capabilities of the Green Economy Hub organization. Green Economy Hubs also build a culture of sustainability, where opportunities to network, collaborate and gain recognition for progress on shared sustainability challenges helps to encourage continued participation and growth in the Hub network, further deepening the synergistic benefits between business activities and the Town's broader sustainability goals.

G. Financial Impacts

With Council's approval, the Collingwood Climate Action Team will receive \$3,500 from the Sustainability budget. At Council's direction, additional funds to meet the requested \$5,000 amount may be provided from a different source proposed by Council. Support for the Green Economy Hub pilot project will continue into 2025 with additional needed funds to be proposed in the 2025 budget process.

H. In Consultation With

Name, Title

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Nicholas Cloet, Sustainability Coordinator sustainability@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. Green Economy Hub Pilot Rationale and Workplan

Respectfully submitted,

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Sustainability Coordinator

Jeffery Fletcher,
Manager of Sustainability & Solid Waste

Alan Pacheco
Director of Operations

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	CSOPS.24.069 Green Economy Hub Support.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 - Green Economy Hub Pilot Rationale and Workplan.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Sep 12, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Jeff Fletcher - Sep 10, 2024 - 5:24 PM

Alan Pacheco - Sep 12, 2024 - 12:32 PM

Green Economy Hub Pilot Rationale and Workplan

Collaboratively prepared by Collingwood Climate Action Team, Institute of Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County staff, with minor edits by Town of The Blue Mountains staff.

Opportunity

Sustainability is becoming a winning strategy for businesses and other organizations across Canada and Green Economy Hubs are playing a vital role. As part of a national network led by non-profit [Green Economy Canada](#), these Hubs help businesses from all sectors and sizes reach their sustainability goals, by providing support to bridge the knowledge and capacity gaps organizations often face when considering sustainability initiatives.

Together, with business and institutional members, their employees, and supporting partners, Green Economy Hubs prove the business-case for sustainability by demonstrating how reducing emissions, water, and waste can improve the bottom line, mitigate business risks, help develop a credible brand, and improve the ability to attract and retain consumers, shareholders, and top tier employees.

Through coaching, tools and resources, educational opportunities, peer networking, and celebration events, Green Economy Hubs help organizations to adapt and thrive in the transition to a sustainable, net-zero future.

With growing concern about climate change, recognition of the responsibilities that municipal governments, businesses, and nonprofits have towards our social and environmental sustainability, as well as the keen interest identified in the Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County areas, now is the perfect time to work with Green Economy Canada to explore how best to mobilize the green transition for local businesses. Our proposal is focused on a Pilot Project that will help assess local market interest for the kind of sustainability support offered by Green Economy Hubs by recruiting 20 local businesses and organizations to participate in a climate action cohort. The experience gained from this project will lay the groundwork for determining what kind of long-term sustainability support model might be well suited for businesses in our region, including the potential to establish our own local Green Economy Hub in the Bruce-Grey-Simcoe area.

Project Description

[Green Economy Canada](#) (GEC) is a national non-profit accelerating Canada's transition to a vibrant and inclusive net-zero future. They launch and grow Green Economy Hubs that bring together, support, and celebrate businesses of all sectors and sizes in setting and achieving sustainability targets. In doing so, they're creating stronger economies and more resilient communities across Canada.

In discussing the potential to bring a [Green Economy Hub](#) here in the Simcoe, Grey and Bruce Counties, Green Economy Canada has recommended starting with a pilot cohort that could lead toward creating a fully functioning Regional Hub to service the South Georgian Bay region and extend to the remainder of Grey County, Bruce County and other municipalities within the Simcoe County North.

This will allow us to confirm market interest and have local business champions to vouch for the value of the support to justify a larger investment in time, resources and costs to explore how best to continue supporting businesses in the region - whether through the development of a full fledged Hub, or a new customized delivery model. The success of the pilot program will lay the groundwork to determine how to bring deeper sustainability support to mobilize our local business community in climate action.

The [Collingwood Climate Action Team](#) (CCAT) has agreed to be the lead charitable, local partner to build awareness and support for the pilot cohort in the region. CCAT will work with Green Economy Canada and other key stakeholders in Southern Georgian Bay and Grey Bruce Counties to identify, cultivate, steward and secure a cohort of 20 organizations that will be supported to measure and reduce their carbon footprint through Green Economy Canada's program. To bolster the success of the initiative, a multi-sectoral partnership will be created with an Advisory Committee of up to seven members. This partnership will ensure a robust project as all members will provide knowledge, local context, contacts, marketing and other support to attract potential businesses to become aware, interested, and potentially join the Cohort Pilot.

The Cohort Pilot of businesses and organizations will gain membership in Green Economy Canada's network and will be guided through a process of measuring their carbon footprint, setting reduction targets and developing reduction strategies, and tracking progress towards their goals depending on the support options they choose. In doing so, these organizations will become more resilient and competitive in the global net-zero transition while also contributing to achieving local and national climate goals. Businesses and organizations will:

- Lower operational costs through energy, water, and waste reduction
- Strengthen brand identity and customer loyalty
- Attract more customers and clients
- Mitigate business risks and costs related to climate change
- Attract and retain employees.

Cohort participants will have access to 1:1 guided support, tools, training and resources, capacity-building events, peer learning opportunities, and recognition for the efforts they are making.

Collectively, with Green Economy Canada as the lead program services partner, Collingwood Climate Action Team as the local charitable supporting organization leading on-the-ground recruitment and awareness-building efforts, and the multi-sectoral local Advisory Committee, we are poised to make the pilot cohort a success and build momentum towards a local low carbon economy in our region. This pilot project will act as a proof of concept of market interest for this kind of support in the region, and act as an important precursor to further exploring a local Green Economy Hub or a customized on-going support model for our local business community.

The SGB Cohort Pilot Project will run from June 2024 - December 2025 with up to two pilot cohort groups of 8-12 local businesses per cohort. Each business will select one of two track memberships - Lead or Insight Track Members (see attachments for description of each) - depending on their needs and interests.

GEC and CCAT would start by seeking out interested organizations to participate, ideally launching the first cohort in the late Fall of 2024 and a second cohort by Spring (around Earth Day) 2025. These two cohorts would work through the GEC program moving towards sustainable business practices and benefits. This will provide time, experience and feedback recruiting and working with the local business community up to the end of 2025. As we near the end of the pilot we will gather feedback from cohort participants, discuss learnings on local business and stakeholder interests, and determine whether to move forward post-pilot with developing a long-term support model for the local business community beyond 2025 (Green Economy Hub or otherwise).

Target Geography

The following areas will be targets for active engagement.

- Collingwood (Simcoe)
- Wasaga Beach (Simcoe)
- Clearview (Simcoe)
- Town of Blue Mountains (Grey)
- Meaford (Grey)
- Grey Highlands (Grey)
- Owen Sound (Grey)

Active engagement includes direct outreach to warm leads and businesses who are good candidates for the pilot cohort: own their facilities, have supportive leadership, mission aligned, strong business case for sustainability. Outreach will also be done through business networks such as Chambers of Commerce, Business Enterprise Centres and Business Improvement Associations. Events will be held in key communities, to bring businesses together to learn about the program.

Passive engagement will be undertaken in the following areas

- Chatsworth
- Georgian Bluffs
- Hanover
- Southgate
- West Grey

Because the current capacity of CCAT is limited, they cannot undertake active engagement everywhere at once. Businesses in these areas will be informed about the pilot program through newsletters and social media. If they reach out to get more information, staff will follow up and continue to engage with them as they learn more and potentially join the pilot cohort. Additional resources may allow for more active engagement in these areas in the future.

Roles and Responsibilities

Green Economy Canada (GEC)

- Lead program services and direct support activities with cohort members
- Provides direction and support to CCAT on business engagement strategy
- Provides guidance, materials, scripts, key messages for business development and holds individual 1-1 meetings with prospective members
- Leads the Cohort pilot groups through a guided support model of carbon measurement, developing reduction targets and strategies, and implementing plans depending on the

membership track-type selected (Lead and Insight) and provides all supporting materials, workshops, and other services.

- Announce cohorts and work being undertaken by local businesses in SGB via GEC channels once cohorts are formed
- Include partnership and thanks to local funders and stakeholders in GEC's Annual Report released in 2025

Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT)

- Supporting charitable organization at the local level leading business development, partnership development, and awareness-building
- Provision of resources (paid and volunteer) to undertake the business engagement efforts to seek members for the Pilot Cohort groups
- Business engagement to seek and acquire business interest to join a cohort pilot team.
- Participate in 1-1 pitch meetings hosted by GEC for prospective members
- Connect with other key stakeholders including Chamber of Commerces, BIAs, Economic Development, Georgian Bay Business Centre, RTO7, Tourism supports and other key business organizations to promote the cohort opportunity
- Host local recruitment events to gain business interest, awareness and support - either in partnership with chamber of commerces or other business network groups, economic development centres and other business support by the municipalities
- Provide local level support during the cohort pilot process.
- Provides administrative support and local profile building of the cohort opportunity in collaboration with GEC, including through website, media, engagement and other communications activities as relevant
- Work with GEC and SGB Pilot Advisory Group to develop a report on the Pilot program for funders.
- Charitable entity with ability to issue tax receipts for funders, administration, and oversight.

Multi-sector Advisory Group

- Provide funding or other resources
- Background support to CCAT during the project to build awareness and champion cohort opportunity
- Help with identifying potential businesses and other contacts at each local municipal level - government, BIAs, chambers and other business relationships of value, non-profit organizations)

- Provide regional/local context of needs, businesses, organizations and other potential local supporters

Grey County

- Provide funding from the Climate Outreach capital budget. Recommending \$5000 in 2024.
- Participation in the multi-sector advisory group (when it is formed)
- Provide credibility for the project by sharing information with potential participants through County communication channels (e.g. Climate Action newsletter, Business Enterprise Centre, Economic Development department).

Municipal Support

Why Green Economy Hub?

The Green Economy Hub is not sector specific, any business or organization can join. In supporting this program, we can provide a service to any business who is interested in achieving sustainability and GHG reductions. We aren't choosing some sectors to support while neglecting others.

The Green Economy Hub model is locally based and nationally connected. There are no other programs that put a local network as a top priority. Grey businesses will have the opportunity to connect with one another across sectors – growing and strengthening the local green economy. Other business sustainability programs may support the businesses, but they don't necessarily support growing the local network.

The primary target for the Green Economy Hub is small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs – less than 500 employees). SMEs have low capacity to take action independently. They typically do not have a sustainability expert on staff and Grey County does not have capacity to meaningfully engage these businesses individually.

Green Economy Hub provides ongoing support with a focus on GHG reduction, and potential for other sustainability projects. They are not a consultant, whose work is over once the report is delivered. It is not a DIY toolkit that puts all the responsibility on the business to make changes. Because the program requires public reporting and targets, it is not “greenwashing” where a business can say they are green without actually doing anything.

Alignment with Going Green in Grey

Through the Green Economy Hub, Grey County can engage the business community in the priority actions identified in “Going Green in Grey,” such as Action 5: Waste Diversion, Action 7: Zero-Emission Vehicles, Action 13: Non-residential Building Energy Efficiency Retrofits, and Action 14: Renewable and Emerging Energy Technologies. The Green Economy Hub can also serve key sectors: Action 3: Sustainable Agriculture, and Action 20: Sustainable Tourism. Perhaps most importantly, by delivering education and services to the business community, Green Economy Hub supports Action 19: Climate Action Engagement.

Other Municipalities

The Town of The Blue Mountains and the Town of Collingwood have both been asked to support Phase 1 of this pilot project. Across the country, municipalities typically support their local Green Economy Hubs, including:

- Waterloo Region, City of Waterloo, City of Kitchener – Impact Network (2009)
- City of Hamilton, City of Burlington - Hamilton Burlington Sustainability Leadership Program (2013)
- York Region, City of Vaughan, Town of Newmarket – Climate Wise Business Network (2016)
- City of Edmonton – Corporate Climate Leaders Program (2018)
- City of London – Green Economy London (2019)
- City of Peterborough, Peterborough County, Township of Selwyn – Green Economy Peterborough (2021)
- City of Moncton, Province of New Brunswick - Green Economy New Brunswick (2021)
- City of Calgary - Green Economy Calgary (2024)