



Staff Report

Operations – Sustainability & Solid Waste

Report To: COW - Operations, Planning and Building Services
Meeting Date: April 29, 2025
Report Number: OPS.25.019
Title: Green Economy Hub Update and Scope Change
Prepared by: Nicholas Cloet, Sustainability Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report OPS.25.019, entitled “Green Economy Hub Update and Scope Change”;

AND THAT Council endorse the allocation of \$5,000 from the Town’s 2025 sustainability budget to the Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT) Green Economy Hub pilot project, which will continue to build a community of practice to directly involve businesses and other organizations in shaping and striving towards their sustainability goals, while also continuing to explore a business model for long term service delivery for the business community in Southern Georgian Bay.

B. Overview

In 2024, the Town provided a monetary contribution of \$5,000 to Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT) to support delivery of a regional Green Economy Hub pilot project, and recommended that staff allocate an additional \$5,000 to CCAT for continued delivery of the pilot project in 2025. A regional Green Economy Hub will encourage and support businesses and other organizations that wish to reduce their GHG emissions and/or work towards other sustainability-related objectives in The Blue Mountains and across Southern Georgian Bay. Council has directed staff to provide quarterly updates on the activities of the Green Economy Hub. This staff report is the first of these quarterly reports. A recent change in the scope of the pilot project may affect Council’s funding decision and is described in this update report for Council’s information and decision-making.

C. Background

The October 8, 2024 Staff Report, [CSOPS.24.069 Green Economy Hub Support](#), outlined the concept of a regional Green Economy Hub and how this aligns with Bold Action 13 in The Blue Mountains Future Story, and requested that Council endorse an allocation of \$3,500 from the Sustainability budget to the Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT) to support their delivery of a Green Economy Hub pilot project in Southern Georgian Bay. This report also outlined the

anticipated services and benefits of a Green Economy Hub and provided a high-level budget for the initiative to better substantiate the request for financial support. In the discussion, Council determined that an allocation of \$5,000 would be more appropriate, and these funds were provided to CCAT in November 2024. Council also directed that a second allocation of \$5,000 from the Town's Sustainability Budget be allocated in 2025 to continue support of the project, and staff were further directed to participate on the Green Economy Hub Advisory Committee and to provide quarterly Staff Reports on the pilot project's progress.

In a meeting with the Director of CCAT on March 11, 2025, a change in the scope of the Green Economy Hub pilot project was shared with Town staff in advance of the third Advisory Committee meeting held on March 13, 2025. The change in scope is of material importance to Council's decision-making and is described in the Analysis.

D. Analysis

The original plan for the Green Economy Hub pilot project was to follow a model propagated by Green Economy Canada (GEC) in communities across Canada. GEC provides support services to their roster of existing Green Economy Hubs, and also provides program services to business and other organizational participants where there is no local Green Economy Hub. GEC was contracted to provide these services to organizations that joined the local pilot, including tools and training for member organizations' staff to track, estimate and report on GHG emissions, support to plan and implement actions to reduce emissions and other environmental impacts, and online workshops to facilitate learning and networking. CCAT was to complement these with local events and recognition opportunities to build a local community of practice and celebrate member achievements, providing other forms of local support, and was responsible for all project management and administration, business development to recruit pilot participants, and running information events and promotions to raise interest in the pilot project. Eventually, after a successful pilot, CCAT would have further developed the Green Economy Hub program and taken on more of the service delivery responsibilities, charging membership fees to fund the organization.

A change in scope was identified as a necessary response to several challenges and changes of circumstance affecting the pilot, including:

- Green Economy Canada indicating that they no longer have the capacity to support new Green Economy Hub organizations – including a potential future Hub organization in Southern Georgian Bay – as their existing hub organizations have been experiencing membership challenges and require more attention and support.
- Recent economic uncertainty caused chiefly by the change in administration in the United States and the illegal tariffs affecting the Canadian business environment across Canada, including in Green Economy Canada's other hub communities and for businesses in Southern Georgian Bay.
- Difficulty recruiting businesses to participate in the local Green Economy Hub pilot project, which may be influenced by current economic risk and uncertainty, but also due to business development activities placing a higher-than-expected burden of cost and staff time upon CCAT as an organization. According to the Director of CCAT, it takes at

least seven touch points with each organization before their participation can be confirmed, making this a time-intensive activity with no guarantee that an organization will follow through on membership.

- Difficulty securing funding for the full cost of delivering the pilot project with Green Economy Canada's service delivery costs, in addition to CCAT's staff and administration costs, for both planned Cohorts of the pilot.

To respond to these challenges and still deliver on the promise of a Green Economy Hub pilot project, CCAT will no longer receive services from Green Economy Canada and will focus on the following activities:

- CCAT will learn from a wide range of potential models, including the GEC Hub model as well as Green Step (currently used by RTO7) and other formal green economy network/organizational models that may exist.
- Cohort 1 will continue to receive Green Economy Canada's services as this is under contract, but there will no longer be a Cohort 2 program.
- Support the three Cohort One participants, celebrate successes, and develop case studies profiling these organizations' experiences.
- Strengthen business relationships and expand the engaged business network with a focus on awareness and education.
- Host events, workshops, and collaborate with chambers and BIAs for deeper engagement.
- Conduct a business needs assessment via surveys, meetings, and community engagement to better understand what area businesses want and need.
- Identify, highlight and celebrate businesses already implementing sustainability practices.
- Encourage local business support campaigns (e.g. sustainable business awards/recognition, shop local initiatives, case studies).
- Continue fundraising efforts based on a modified budget to align with adjusted project scope.

It is recommended that Council allocate the previously-committed \$5,000 from the 2025 sustainability budget to continue supporting this initiative. The revised scope with lower costs and focus on building regional capacity and community is feasible, will achieve meaningful positive impact with the Town's business community, and helps the Town accomplish Bold Action 13 in TBM Future Story.

Advisory Committee

The Green Economy Hub Advisory Committee aims to provide CCAT with support through outreach to businesses in their respective communities, promotions of the program, securing funding, and/or additional advice and assistance to CCAT as needed and appropriate.

The Advisory Committee holds monthly meetings and currently includes representatives of the following organizations and community groups:

- Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT)
- Institute of Southern Georgian Bay (ISGB)
- South Georgian Bay Innovation Fund
- Town of The Blue Mountains
- Town of Collingwood
- Climate Action Now Network TBM (CANN)
- Wasaga Beach Climate Action Team (WBCAT)
- Clearview Sustainability Network (CSN)
- Meaford Climate Action
- Grey Highlands Climate Action Group
- Beaver Valley Outreach (BVO) as both pilot project participant and Advisory Committee member
- Rockside Campbell Design Inc. as both pilot project participant and Advisory Committee member.

The information for this update report comes largely from the meeting minutes of the Green Economy Hub Advisory Committee, which has so far held three meetings on November 21, 2024, January 16, 2025, and March 13, 2025, as well as from direct discussion and correspondence with the Director of CCAT.

Town staff will continue to participate in Advisory Committee meetings to support the Green Economy Hub project and build interest among organizations in the Town of The Blue Mountains, provided Town Council supports this initiative with the revised scope.

Communications and Recruitment

Communication strategies that CCAT has undertaken to reach businesses and other organizations have included: seeking stories of local businesses that have benefitted from including sustainability in their decision-making; developing news release and website content; and coordinating communications across all Advisory Committee and other communications partners across the region.

Recruitment strategies have included: targeting specific types of businesses most likely to benefit from the Green Economy Hub model; reaching out to any warm contacts of Advisory Committee members; and approaching non-profit and community organizations where business owners and operators tend to be active (such as the Rotary Clubs). CCAT continues to build a contact list of media, Town Economic Development staff, regional business networks and press/newsletter deadlines to help get the word out about Green Economy Hub-related programming.

Cohort 1 of the Green Economy Hub pilot project was able to secure three participants – Beaver Valley Outreach, Rockside Campbell Design Inc., and Georgian Bay Beverage Company. Four businesses considered but ultimately declined participating in Cohort 1 for various reasons and six businesses were considering if they could participate in Cohort 2 of the original pilot project. With the change in scope, CCAT will continue working with Cohort 1 members, and will continue engagement and outreach with previously-contacted businesses and their roster of

more than 375 contacts. Sharing regional case studies centered on the three engaged organizations will help demonstrate the value proposition of taking action on sustainability-related goals to the broader business community, in turn driving further engagement, knowledge-sharing and networking.

Funding

To support the pilot project, CCAT had secured approximately 50% of the required funding to launch two cohorts of the Green Economy Hub pilot in 2025 with GEC support. Each of these cohorts had capacity for up to 10 participating organizations from across Southern Georgian Bay. The sources of secured funds include The Institute of Southern Georgian Bay, the Southern Georgian Bay Innovation Fund, Town of The Blue Mountains, Town of Collingwood, and a private donor.

The reduction in scope has greatly reduced CCAT's financial needs to deliver regional green economy programming. The original funding shortfall CCAT faced was \$39,000. With unspent funds raised in 2024 and no longer receiving services from GEC, a much lower amount of \$14,000 in additional funding will be needed to support the revised scope of the pilot program in 2025. CCAT will continue seeking additional sources of funding and identifying in-kind or other sources of support to fund and/or further manage the revised program costs.

Events, Deputations, and Memberships

Events:

- Information Session at New Wasaga Beach Arena, October 3, 2024
- Information Session at The Blue Mountains Public Library, November 26, 2024
- Information Session at Collingwood Public Library, November 27, 2024

CCAT will organize new events for the regional business community, now aiming for fall 2025. Current efforts are focusing on making one-on-one connections with businesses and launching a survey to better understand the needs of businesses.

Deputations have been made to all Southern Georgian Bay communities to request supporting funds:

- Town of Collingwood, October 7, 2024: provided \$3,500 in 2024, anticipating \$5,000 in 2025;
- Town of The Blue Mountains, October 8, 2024: provided \$5,000 in 2024, with \$5000 to be allocated from the sustainability budget in 2025;
- Wasaga Beach, October 24, 2024: to be considered in 2025;
- Clearview, November 4, 2024: to be considered in 2025;
- Meaford, December 9, 2024: to be considered in 2025;
- Grey Highlands, December 18, 2024: to be considered in 2025.

Information about the revised scope has or will be communicated with all funders and potential funders of the Green Economy Hub project.

CCAT has joined all Chambers of Commerce in Southern Georgian Bay, and presented to the Collingwood BIA on January 16, 2025. CCAT will work with these organizations under the revised program scope to run sustainability and green-economy events that engage the broader business community.

Town Supports

The Town has taken steps to help CCAT raise awareness of the pilot and recruit local organizations, including:

- Staff attended the November 26, 2024 Green Economy Hub Pilot Project Information Session at The Blue Mountains Public Library;
- Promoted the November 26 event on the Town's social media and Economic Development mailing list;
- A portion of The Blue Mountains and Area 2nd Annual Sustainability Summit will provide the Green Economy Hub project with a platform and will include a panel discussion on sustainability in business;
- Direct outreach with several local business representatives.

Members of Council and The Blue Mountains community are encouraged to share information about the Green Economy Hub pilot project with local business contacts. Those interested in learning more can visit <https://www.collingwoodclimateaction.com/greeneconomy>.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

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

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.

F. Environmental Impacts

Green Economy Hubs help businesses and other organizations lessen their environmental impacts and pursue sustainability goals and targets. They can help organizations identify ambitious yet appropriate GHG emission reduction, water or waste reduction targets and best practices, support networking and peer learning to build a culture of sustainability and knowledge sharing, and provide a venue for recognition and celebration of participants working towards and eventually reaching their sustainability targets and milestones.

G. Financial Impacts

The Town provided \$5,000 in support to Collingwood Climate Action Team's Green Economy Hub pilot project in 2024 out of the sustainability budget. With Council's direction and continued support of the initiative with the revised scope, the Town will provide an additional \$5,000 to CCAT in 2025, also from the sustainability budget.

H. In Consultation With

N/A

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

No attachments.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jeffery Fletcher,
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Alan Pacheco
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For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	OPS.25.019 Green Economy Hub Update and Scope Change.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Apr 15, 2025

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

Jeff Fletcher - Apr 4, 2025 - 9:16 AM

Alan Pacheco - Apr 15, 2025 - 8:59 AM