



Staff Report

Operations – Sustainability & Solid Waste

Report To: COW-Operations_Planning_and_Development_Services
Meeting Date: November 19, 2024
Report Number: CSOPS.24.080
Title: Circular Economy Opportunities Report
Prepared by: Nicholas Cloet, Sustainability Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CSOPS.24.080, entitled “Circular Economy Opportunities Report”;

AND THAT Council direct staff to publish the Circular Economy Opportunities Report and Waste Planning Implementation Guide to the Town’s website and to proceed with community engagement activities identified in the Circular Economy Opportunities Report.

B. Overview

Bold Action 14 in The Blue Mountains Future Story directs Town staff to “Develop a Circular Economy Recommendations Report and expand circular economy programming”. Through the first half of 2024, the Circular Economy Project engaged with local waste-producing organizations and circular economy stakeholders to better understand local challenges and opportunities around waste diversion. The primary deliverable is a Circular Economy Opportunities Report, which will help guide future efforts by the Town and community stakeholders to divert waste from landfill and build a more circular economy.

C. Background

The Blue Mountains Future Story (TBM Future Story) focuses on several pillars of sustainability, organized into six Goal areas including: Natural Environment; Built Environment; Economy; Community and Culture; Social Well-Being; and Governance. TBM Future Story includes Bold Action 14: “Develop a Circular Economy Recommendations Report and expand circular economy programming”. The Key Steps for this action ask Town Staff to support local circular economy efforts and to develop a report exploring circular economy opportunities for the community. The Circular Economy concept involves reducing overall waste production as much as possible, and treating waste as a resource by finding local, productive uses for waste streams that otherwise would have gone to landfill.

A scope of work was developed and a competitive process to select a consultant took place in late 2023. The final deliverables sought through the project included:

- Local Waste Planning and Implementation Guide/Booklet
- Circular Economy Opportunities Report
- Supporting Materials (including presentation, workshop and other engagement materials).

Consultants with MJ Waste Solutions began working with the Town in January 2024 on research and stakeholder engagement to inform the project's primary deliverables. In addition to the expertise and experience of MJ Waste Solutions, staff also engaged a Master's student with the University of Waterloo to undertake research into single use plastics use in the foodservice sector. The activities of the consultant and student are described in the Analysis section.

Mary Jean O'Donnell of MJ Waste Solutions presented at the Town's first annual The Blue Mountains and Area Sustainability Summit on the Circular Economy model and the project for the Town. Raising awareness of the Town's circular economy work and future opportunities was helpful for the audience of business, non-profit and public attendees, but did not inform the final deliverables.

On May 17, 2024 a Waste Planning Implementation Guide and waste audit worksheet were completed and submitted to the Town (Attachment 2), and on July 31, 2024, a final draft Circular Economy Opportunities Report was completed and submitted to the Town (Attachment 1).

D. Analysis

To inform development of the project's deliverables, MJ Waste Solutions engaged in the following activities:

- Researched circular economy best practices, programs and plans of other Canadian communities, highlighting six (6) in particular: City of Guelph, Region of Peel and York Region, Ontario; Banff, Alberta; and Squamish and Whistler, British Columbia.
- Conducted 18 interviews with community members participating in the local circular economy and/or business community, including 13 business operators, and five (5) community groups/non-profit organizations.
- Delivered a community engagement workshop with Town staff on March 5, 2024, attracting 16 attendees.
- Prepared a Waste Planning Implementation Guide (Attachment 1) and an accompanying Waste Audit Worksheet (Excel worksheet to assist organizations in keeping track of their waste audit results).
- Prepared the Circular Economy Opportunities Report (Attachment 2).

The Waste Planning Implementation Guide will be adapted by the Town and used to help businesses and other waste-producing organizations in The Blue Mountains better understand their own waste production and diversion practices, challenges and opportunities. The core of

the tool is a waste audit methodology, and an accompanying Waste Audit Worksheet can be provided to interested parties. By demystifying the waste audit process, more organizations will have the information they need to make informed decisions about waste diversion, and will be better positioned to identify any potential circular economy opportunities.

The Circular Economy Opportunities Report provides a descriptive list of potential circular economy opportunities, along with the results of the project's community engagement and research into best practices. The circular economy opportunities were informed by the research and engagement activities, and represent reasonable options for the Town and other community partners to consider as next steps.

The Circular Economy Opportunities (beginning on page 11 of Attachment 1) are organized into five categories:

1. **Strategy Development & Policy Integration:** suggests how to embed circular principles into existing Town policies and where to focus next steps in developing a circular economy strategy with key partners.
2. **Data Collection:** outlines data considerations to define strategic priorities.
3. **Communications & Engagement:** lists ways to leverage existing circular economy initiatives to increase uptake, as well as ideas for public education and/or engagement campaigns to encourage specific behaviours.
4. **Infrastructure Upgrades:** recommends potential upgrades to existing waste management infrastructure to help with and expand waste diversion efforts.
5. **External Partnerships:** explores potential organizations the Town may partner with for funding or to scale up efforts throughout the region.

Town staff will likely proceed with the opportunities identified under Strategy Development & Policy Integration in the near term, as continued community engagement is a key part of making progress on the circular economy. Opportunity 1. a) encourages the Town to "continue to engage stakeholders to build key relationships and encourage further momentum on the transition to a circular economy", and 1. b) encourages the Town to build a plan to move forward, including a "steering committee or working group with the BIAs and community groups". With Attachments 1 and 2 received by Council, Town staff will be able to promote these as resources and build further engagement in a working group, perhaps drawing membership from interview respondents and workshop attendees.

Town staff can also look closely at its procurement policies, as described in 1. c). This opportunity aligns with Bold Action 17, "Establish decision-making and reporting structures within The Town of The Blue Mountains to ensure decisions contribute towards the Vision and Goals of this plan". The Town is behind target on Bold Action 17, further emphasizing the positioning of this action as a near-term priority for staff.

The above opportunities and the others that are outlined in the Circular Economy Opportunities Report are not finalized directives for the Town; rather, these are opportunities for the Town, as well as local businesses and other stakeholders, to explore further to collectively build a circular economy. Any initiatives requiring financial support from the Town will be funded

either as part of the annual Sustainability budget or will be presented to Council for consideration of additional funding.

As mentioned in the Background section, the Town also worked with a Master's student in the University of Waterloo's Master of Environment and Business program. The student conducted surveys with food service providers in The Blue Mountains and worked with Town staff, Blue Mountain Resort and Blue Mountain Village Association to undertake a preliminary waste audit of public receptacles in four locations: Thornbury downtown, Clarksburg downtown, Blue Mountain Resort, and Blue Mountain Village. Some highlights from this study include:

- Waste audit of public receptacles identifying contaminated waste streams (recycling in the garbage, garbage in the recycling) and weights of various types of single-use packaging.
- Packaging related actions that foodservice businesses have already taken, and those that they plan to take, with respect to single-use packaging.
- Identified barriers to reducing use and diversion of single-use packaging.
- Recommendations for how the Town can support businesses in reducing single-use packaging.

The Master's student final report will be included with the Circular Economy Opportunities Report and Waste Planning Implementation Guide on the Town's website after Council receives this report and attachments.

Ultimately, a circular economy for The Blue Mountains will require local organizations – including the Town – to think about their business decisions, supply chains, waste streams and diversion opportunities. The Town's role in community engagement and in leading TBM Future Story will be critical to motivating progress, but building a community-wide circular economy will also involve local businesses and other waste-producing organizations taking a critical look at their own operations and seeing what opportunities exist for them. Also, as waste diversion and circular economy opportunities may rely on partnerships across municipal borders, the Town's Manager of Sustainability and Solid Waste is participating in a County-led Waste Community of Practice to identify joint opportunities to improve waste diversion.

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

A Circular Economy treats waste as a resource, diverting as much waste from landfill and towards more productive uses as possible. By moving from a linear waste stream – where resources are extracted, processed, manufactured, used and then landfilled – to a circular economy, the Town could see improved waste diversion and extension of the landfill’s lifespan, reduced methane emissions at the landfill with improved organics diversion, reduced embodied carbon in building materials or other local purchases where products or building materials are reused/recycled.

G. Financial Impacts

The Circular Economy Opportunities Report does not have dollar costs associated with the identified opportunities. As the Town continues to implement TBM Future Story, including Bold Action 14, staff will utilize the sustainability budget and seek third-party funding or in-kind sources of assistance where feasible to support specific opportunities. If an initiative requires additional funding from the Town, a staff report detailing the specific funding request will be made and/or the request will be included in the annual budget process.

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

1. Circular Economy Opportunities Report
2. Waste Planning Implementation Guide

Respectfully submitted,

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Jeffery Fletcher,
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Alan Pacheco
Director of Operations

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	CSOPS.24.080 Circular Economy Opportunities Report.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 Circular Economy Opportunities Report.pdf - Attachment 2 Waste Planning Implementation Guide.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Nov 4, 2024

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

Jeff Fletcher - Oct 23, 2024 - 3:07 PM

Alan Pacheco - Nov 4, 2024 - 12:07 PM