



CITIZEN COMMITTEE REPORT

To:	Planning Committee
From:	Climate Change Advisory Committee _____ Ian Borsuk, Co-Chair _____ Gabriella Kalapos, Co-Chair
Date:	October 1, 2024
Re:	Recommendations respecting the Green Building Standards Report

Recommendations

- (a) That the staff report to Planning Committee respecting Green Building Standards currently on the agenda for the meeting on October 1st, 2024, be delayed to a future meeting in 2025 to allow time for the following recommendations of the Climate Change Advisory Committee to be implemented:
- (i) The newly formed Climate Change Advisory Committee should be included as a key stakeholder in the ongoing consultation process on Green Building Standards before bringing a final staff report to council
 - (ii) The Climate Change Advisory Committee, through the newly formed Technical & Governance and Buildings working group, collaborate with staff to address gaps identified in the draft Green Building Standards, including:

- (1) The draft standards do not clearly outline a framework that phases in successively more stringent tiered standards over a fixed timeline with full transparency on future requirements to all stakeholders
 - (2) The draft standards do not outline emissions limits that are sufficient to require new buildings to transition to efficient, low-emissions technology now or in the future
 - (3) The draft standards do not align with Hamilton's Climate Action Strategy to achieve net-zero by 2050 and instead allow for significant fossil fuel lock-in to occur
- (b) That the Climate Change Advisory Committee, including the Co-chairs and members of the Technical & Governance and Buildings Working Groups be approved to delegate to an upcoming meeting of the Planning Committee on the Green Building Standards report.

Background

On March 27th, 2019, Hamilton City Council declared a Climate Change Emergency and subsequently approved the Hamilton Climate Action Strategy (HCAS) in August 2022 committing to a net-zero emission target by 2050. The HCAS calls for the City of Hamilton to enact net-zero aligned building and development standards, guidelines or policies as soon as possible to avoid the need for costly retrofits in the future. And, notably, the HCAS which is now City of Hamilton policy was not in place when the consultant report on Green Building Standards was prepared in early 2021. The Climate Change Advisory Committee and associated working groups were also not established at earlier points in the process of the Green Building Standards development.

Over the next 25 - 30 years, the population of the City of Hamilton is expected to grow from 584,000 in 2021 to at least 820,000 by 2051. Accommodating the increased population requires an estimated 110,000 housing units. If development continues business-as-usual, the emissions from buildings within the City of Hamilton would track upwards with the 40% rise in population. This would take Hamilton off track from our HCAS goals and drive the costs of retrofits needed even higher.

At the time of installation, efficient and low-emissions technologies like heat pumps are on cost parity with separate conventional appliances like a gas-burning furnace and AC unit. These more efficient technologies provide benefits to residents by lowering energy use and associated utility bills, and benefits to everyone in society by drastically reducing methane pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. If the opportunity during the construction phase is missed, the cost of retrofitting homes afterwards is prohibitively

expensive for the average household, and prohibitively expensive for the City of Hamilton to fund at scale through municipal incentives.

Municipal Green Development Standards have been adopted by Ontario municipalities since the mid-2000s. In 2006 the Town of East Gwillimbury implemented a green standard requiring Energy Star energy performance for all new residential development. Then in 2008 the City of Toronto advanced the Toronto Green Standards that identified the pathway for energy and emissions performance in all new buildings, making the standards mandatory in 2010. Since then, Toronto is on version 4 of the Toronto Green Standard and green standards have been adopted by: Vaughan, Brampton, Richmond Hill, Halton Hills, Markham, Whitby, Pickering, Ajax, Aurora, King Township, Caledon and Mississauga.

Green Standards identify the measures that a municipality has identified as a priority and bring them together into a comprehensive framework driving uptake and implementation of sustainability metrics through the development application review process. Developments that conserve energy and water, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, manage stormwater and maintain and protect green spaces reduce the burden on municipal infrastructure, defer the need for future retrofits and upgrades and lower municipal service delivery costs all while advancing numerous municipal policy priorities.

The leading best practices for Green Standards is to use a framework that phases in new measures over a transparent timeline, with more stringent limits beginning as voluntary and then becoming mandatory, typically after 2-3 years. This provides a clear step-by-step roadmap to all stakeholders that shows the full path of the planned transition to sustainable building practices, with clarity on what requirements to expect both now and in the future.

Providing a clear pathway to transition away from fossil fuels as efficiently as possible is an imperative not only at a local level, but across Canada, and globally. The UN has identified the fossil fuel methane, also known as “natural gas”, as being a key area of concern because it has a far greater near term impact accelerating climate change than carbon dioxide. While climate change discussions have long focused on carbon dioxide, the science shows that methane emissions account for 30-50% of all global warming to date. Because the half-life of methane is relatively short, the bulk of the methane emissions currently causing that outsized warming effect were emitted within the last 20 years. Similarly, reductions in methane emissions present the greatest opportunity to reduce the near-term impacts from climate change.

Another significant challenge is fossil fuel lock-in: it makes transitioning to sustainable solutions more expensive and challenging to implement. In February 2024, the City of

Hamilton unanimously passed the motion “Support for the Decision of the Ontario Energy Board to End the Gas Pipeline Subsidy” to express the City’s support for fiscally prudent and environmentally sustainable development practices that are priced appropriately to disincentivize future risk to residents, particularly the cost of stranded fossil-fuel assets coupled with the costs of retrofits.

Aligning Hamilton’s Green Building Standards with established municipal priorities, including HCAS and council term goals on sustainable development and transparency, provides an unparalleled opportunity for Hamilton to meet its commitments and realize these goals through policy, and deliver these results to residents without incurring additional costs.

Analysis / Rationale

The City of Toronto’s Green Standard framework uses a tiered process providing clarity and transparency to the development community on what present requirements are, what future requirements will be and the time frame for when those tiers will become mandatory. Hamilton has an opportunity to adopt Green Building Standards that advances similar leading practices and metrics. Hamilton also has the opportunity to respond to the development community by providing them choices for how they meet the requirements, including prescriptive options that provide pathways to compliance that do not cause additional administrative burdens.

The area of the draft standards that is of the greatest concern is the emissions requirements. Given that effective emissions limits of 3-5 kg CO₂e/m²/yr are the estimated upper threshold to require buildings to transition from gas-burning space and water heating appliances to more efficient, low-emissions alternatives like heat pumps, the draft standards do not show a pathway to phasing out fossil fuels in new developments now or in the future. The desire of this committee is to see Hamilton’s Green Building Standards work in concert with HCAS to reduce the likelihood of locked-in fossil fuel use in new developments, especially when cost effective electrification opportunities are available during construction but the cost of retrofits to buildings remains prohibitively expensive.

Unlike the City of Toronto, Hamilton also faces added challenges around low-rise development that need to be addressed in Green Building Standards. Our urban boundary still contains areas for low density development to occur, and the emissions from this type of development over the coming years could be significant.

The role of the Climate Change Advisory Committee is to provide feedback from key stakeholders in the community to the City of Hamilton, especially around important policies like Green Building Standards which have highly significant impacts towards making Hamilton climate-ready.

The newly formed Technical & Governance and Buildings working groups would like to engage with the Hamilton Planning Department and other staff to explore opportunities and challenges associated with adopting more ambitious Green Building Standards that would seek to align us with municipal leaders like the City of Toronto and most importantly to keep the City of Hamilton on track to meet its HCAS commitments to the community.