

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

The Future of Future Oxford and the Community Sustainability Plan

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Chief Administrative Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That County Council receive Report CAO 2024-01, entitled “The Future of Future Oxford and the Community Sustainability Plan” in response to Council direction given at the November 22, 2023 Council meeting to assess how Future Oxford aligns with the Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and can advance its initiatives;
2. And further, that County Council approves transitioning focus from the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* and the Future Oxford Partnership, to focus on achieving the goals and initiatives within the current Strategic Plan as described herein;
3. And further, that Oxford County staff, through the new Community Environmental Sustainability FTE as approved in the 2024 budget, assume the leadership and direction in progressing initiatives and activities related to Goals 2.1 and 2.2.2 within the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan;
4. And further, that the Smart Energy Oxford committee and the Zero Waste Oxford committee be encouraged to work in partnership with the new FTE as community advisory and engagement groups, in alignment with the former environment pillar, yet with a revised focus on the initiatives contained within Goals 2.1 and 2.2.2 of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan;
5. And further, that the County continue to collaborate with Safe and Well Oxford and Reducing Poverty Together as the existing groups which are actively progressing initiatives related to the former community pillar;
6. And further, that the County’s efforts related to the former economy pillar, be focused on the relevant goals and initiatives within the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and as reflected in Appendix 1;

7. And further, that when creating the *Climate Action Plan* as identified in Goal 2.1.1 of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, existing relevant documents and plans be considered (including the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*, *Zero Waste Plan* and the *100% RE Plan*) and that these plans be updated or made redundant as necessary.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- A refreshed and revitalized approach to the County's efforts in supporting strategic commitments focused on community safety and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction.
- More focused and dedicated efforts targeted to environmental sustainability and Goals 2.1 and 2.2 of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, led by a dedicated new Community Environmental Sustainability FTE and restructuring of the existing Future Oxford.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Following Council approval of the above recommendations, updates will be made to documents and websites as required and meetings with the Future Oxford partnership will cease. Smart Energy Oxford, Zero Waste Oxford and Reducing Poverty Together meetings will continue as community advisory and engagement groups.

Financial Impact

The recommendations contained in this report have no financial implications outside of what is already included in the 2024 budget. There will be indirect savings and efficiencies, particularly with staff time, as the intent is to streamline efforts and staff time.

Communications

If approved by County Council, the retirement of the Future Oxford Partnership would involve a number of communication steps, foremost among these being a dialogue with current members to acknowledge their contributions and discuss other opportunities to continue to support sustainability efforts within the community.

Other communication activities would involve:




- Communicating the change and new direction to community partners and other key stakeholders (e.g., area municipalities), the general public and employees; and
- Retiring the Future Oxford brand assets (logo, etc.), website and social media sites, which would remain under County copyright/ownership to protect against future use by other third parties, recognizing the strong level of awareness, association and identification of Future Oxford as an Oxford County program.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendations in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
<p>Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being</p>	<p>Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p>	<p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities</p>

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

The *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* was originally approved by County Council on September 9, 2015. The plan was developed from a broad consultation and engagement process led by a Steering Committee comprised of active and informed citizens representing a cross-section of the community from both a geographic perspective as well as expertise within the 'pillars' of sustainability (community, economy, environment).

The structure approved by Council is pictured below and included a partnership and three sub-committees (Community Oxford, Economy Oxford, Environment Oxford). Future Oxford has essentially existed in this capacity since then, with additional committees (Reforest Oxford, Smart Energy Oxford, Zero Waste and Reducing Poverty Together) also working towards the goals and targets of the Community Sustainability Plan.



Historically, the County has provided staff resources and time to support Future Oxford and its subcommittees. Shortly after approval of the Plan, Oxford County gained significant momentum and quickly became a leader in environmental sustainability in the municipal realm. Over time, this momentum has slowed following changes in County Council, membership composition of the Future Oxford committees, senior leadership and staffing at the County and evolving examination and perspective on how to best achieve the County's sustainability goals.

County Council has set out a number of commitments for the 2023-2026 term and sought more information about how some of these goals intersect with Future Oxford's *Community Sustainability Plan* following Future Oxford's delegation to Council last fall. This report and recommendations are in response to the following resolution passed at the November 22, 2023 Council meeting:

Resolved that the information provided in delegation 6.1 on the open meeting agenda of November 22, 2023 be received;
And further, that staff return with a report on how Future Oxford aligns with the strategic priorities of Oxford County and can advance its initiatives.

Comments

One of the most notable changes impacting Future Oxford is the implementation of the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) legislation. Through this legislation, all municipalities that provide police services must have a CSWB plan. Oxford County was asked to take the lead on implementing the plan on behalf of the Area Municipalities, which has shifted some of the County's focus and human resource allocation to initiatives within Oxford's CSWB plan (*Safe and Well Oxford*). County Council and the Area Municipalities have demonstrated their commitment to the success of the plan and advancing its progress.

The other most significant change impacting Future Oxford is the updated Strategic Plan as approved by Council in September of 2023. This document has clearly identified the priorities of Council, which does incorporate some aspects of the existing *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*. This version of the Strategic Plan, however, does not have as much emphasis on goals and initiatives previously associated with the economy pillar of the *Future*

Oxford Community Sustainability Plan because this is an area of potential overlap with the work already happening within the Area Municipalities.

Another significant change that has affected the role of Future Oxford is the new Community Environmental Sustainability FTE in the 2024 budget. This will be a full-time position and will be dedicated to advancing initiatives within the community related to environmental sustainability and goals 2.1 and 2.2 of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

When considering changes and factors impacting the future of Future Oxford, lack of time and resources have become increasingly problematic in recent years. County staff often hear from stakeholders and service providers that they do not have enough time or human resources and are conversely spending too much time in meetings and not enough time spent actually addressing the issues. With that in mind, it is important that the County do its part and take a critical look at how we are allocating resources to not exacerbate this particular struggle.

Since its approval, the Strategic Plan has been established and utilized as a foundation for the organization, driving the day-to-day work of County staff while also representing a breadth of priorities and initiatives requiring effective and efficient use of time in order to meet these goals over the next few years. Oftentimes, in order to do this, staff need to look critically at existing processes and services with a willingness to adapt and do things differently to be effective and efficient.

If Future Oxford were to remain status quo, there would continue to be a partnership group and three pillars with the various subcommittees. There are at least two County staff that attend each of these meetings, as well as additional staff time for preparations, projects and other related work. The issue is not in the time being spent, but in that County staff would be attending and participating in meetings and committees with significant overlap. Duplication of work is not always negative, but attention should be given to whether or not it makes sense in the circumstances; with highly complex issues such as homelessness, mental health, substance misuse and poverty, for example, efforts need to be collaborative and focused, not duplicated.

Another significant challenge if Future Oxford remains status quo is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on volunteers to drive the progression of strategic priorities. It is difficult to get consistent and ongoing participation from members and often end up holding meetings where only a handful of individuals are present. Regardless of meeting dates and times, people are busy and it is difficult to expect them to attend these meetings in addition to their own employment, family and personal commitments.

Attachment 1 represents a visual to show how the original three pillars of the *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan* would continue to be priorities of Oxford County, through the updated Strategic Plan and other existing plans and committees, but in a more streamlined manner and with less duplication, maximizing the expertise and time of County staff.

CONCLUSIONS

With the background and comments explained above in mind, the recommendations in this report reflect a more streamlined and efficient approach to supporting the goals and initiatives outlined in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. There are existing committees, stakeholders and County staff with a greater ability to progress initiatives that fall within the Community and Economy pillars of the current *Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*.

What lacks more in the organization and the broader community is with regards to the Environment pillar. However, with the addition of the new Community Environmental Sustainability position in the County's 2024 budget, the County will now have an employee dedicated to this pillar, providing the leadership and direction in progressing initiatives and activities related to Goals 2.1 and 2.2.2. The incumbent, along with Smart Energy Oxford and Zero Waste Oxford, can continue to engage with the broader community to advance environmental sustainability-related initiatives. This individual will be accountable for making connections and building partnerships that will truly advance the community in its progress towards 100% Renewable Energy and Zero Waste. Overall, by having this new employee lead the community environmental sustainability efforts formerly associated with Future Oxford, other County staff can shift and adjust their focus to other strategic priorities such as Safe and Well Oxford, while remaining willing to provide support and collaborate as needed.

Change is often difficult, and the proposed recommendations are certainly a shift from how Future Oxford has existed in the past. The dedication and passion of Future Oxford members to contribute positively to their communities and make Oxford County a better place to live has not gone unnoticed. With the significant changes that Oxford County has experienced as both an organization and as a community, this is an appropriate time to reevaluate the future of Future Oxford. The proposed recommendations will maintain some of the original intentions but move forward in a more strategic and focused way, accounting for changes in priorities and many other factors that have evolved.

SIGNATURES

Report author:

Original signed by

Sarah Hamulecki
Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Continuous Improvement

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Visual Representation of Community Sustainability Pillars and Proposed Realignment, January 24, 2024