



## Energy & Environment Advisory Committee

### MINUTES

A meeting of the Energy & Environment Advisory Committee (E&E) was held on November 6, 2025 at 4:00 p.m., Rotary Complex – Mansbridge Room, 353 McCarthy Road W., Stratford ON

**Committee Members Present:** Mike Sullivan – Chair Presiding, Felicity Sutcliffe, Craig Merkley, Ken Clarke, Anita Jacobsen, Linda Wakenhut, Vanni Azzano, Julia Schneider, Councillor Jo-Dee Burbach

**Staff Present:** Vicky Trotter – Council Committee Coordinator, Emily Skelding – Supervisor of Waste Operations, Mike Mousley – Transit Manager, Casey Riehl – Recording Secretary

**Regrets:** Geoff Krauter, Councillor Larry McCabe, Anna Stratton

#### 1. Call to Order

Mike Sullivan, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Reading of the Land Acknowledgment and a moment of silent reflection.

Reading of the Respectful Workplace Conduct Statement

#### 2. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

None declared.

#### 3. Adoption of the Previous Minutes

**Motion by** Ken Clarke

**Seconded by** Felicity Sutcliffe

**THAT the minutes from the Energy & Environment Advisory Committee meeting dated October 2, 2025 be adopted as printed. Carried**

#### **4. Discussion on Free Transit in Stratford**

Mike Mousley, Transit Manager, attended the meeting to discuss some of the questions that have been raised regarding free transit options in Stratford. Highlights of the presentation included the following:

##### **Provincial Gas Tax (PGT) for Transit**

In Ontario, 2 cents/litre is set aside for the sole purpose of financially assisting Transit services. The gas tax is calculated 70/30 (70% ridership and 30% population). PGT for Stratford in 2024 was an allocation of just over \$513,000 which was paid out in late summer of 2025. These funds can be used for capital projects or for offsetting operating costs. Over the past several years the PGT has been allocated towards Capital projects for Stratford Transit and used to fund the City's 26.67% portion of ICIP (Investing in Canada Infrastructure Fund) Projects. For Stratford Transit, just over 14 million was approved in 2018 and covers 27 Transit Capital projects in total with the Federal Government paying 40%, Province paying 33.33% and the City paying 26.67%. The City's portion is covered by PGT to ensure there is no negative local tax levy impact for these projects. PGT can only be used to fund transit services or capital projects and cannot be used elsewhere. Federal Gas Tax (FGT) is a separate funding stream used for infrastructure projects. FGT and PGT are different and separate.

##### **How Ridership is Calculated**

Ridership is calculated through the farebox (cash, tickets, passes).

Ridership information over the past few years:

2024 - 518,457

2023 - 551,160

2022 - 472,486

Pre-covid the annual ridership was generally 640,000.

Transit properties in general are still well below ridership prior to Covid. A survey through OPTA in June asked its members (from the same timeframe the year previous) if they were above/below predicted ridership and responses came back at 15%-20% below. We can speculate the reasons why, including that many people are still working remotely and options for delivery to your door provides less of a reason to hop on a bus to go shopping.

Stratford's lower ridership was also impacted by a decision two (2) years ago by the local Board of Education to provide yellow school buses rather than paying for student passes to use transit.

About 220 passes were purchased monthly for Grade 7 and 8's (and a handful of high school students) at the normal rate of \$60.00 each equated to \$13,200.00 per month in fare revenue which also removed approximately 40,000 to 50,000 rides annually.

### **Electric buses**

2 years ago, an electrification feasibility study was conducted by HDR Consultants and in their findings, they concluded that Stratford Transit could make the transition over time and was feasible. After receiving that study, staff proceeded to apply the Federal ZETF (Zero Emission Transit Fund) to assist with Capital electrification infrastructure, buses, etc. A year and a half later the City was denied the 25 million dollars ask due to the program being over-subscribed. Staff are now investigating other options to secure funding. If funding cannot be confirmed, the City will need to start allocating funds to a reserve for future use.

### **Cost to go 15-minute Service for Part of the Day**

Each bus has an approximate operating cost of \$100.26/hour. If we doubled the service for 1 hour in the morning and/or 1 hour in the afternoon (peak times) and 2 buses per route it would be approximately \$1,403.64 per day or about \$365,000.00 annually.

The more problematic issue is that the City's only has thirteen (13) buses and usually have one (1) or two (2) not available due to service and safety inspections and two (2) being used for school special routes. It would also require seven (7) additional drivers, which is tremendously difficult to recruit and retain.

### **Free Transit**

Free transit has been a topic of discussion amongst different municipalities and Councils, specifically after the pandemic ended and the struggle to win back ridership began.

Orangeville is of great focus recently as they continue to pilot free transit and it appears to be very successful. Pre-Covid data was about 100,000 rides annually over three (3) routes, 2023 was approximately 220,000 rides when no fares were introduced and 2024 was approximately 240,000 rides. The bigger question has been

whether the increase has been new riders, regular users accessing the service more frequently or a combination of both. It can be difficult data to obtain as bus fares are generic and do not single out who is a new rider and who is not. When speaking with staff, it would appear that there is new ridership to some degree (students especially). It would be safe to say there would be an increase with new riders.

Although there are very different Transit services between both municipalities, Stratford operates seven (7) routes Monday to Friday with 30 minute service and On Demand Transit on Saturday and Sunday, Orangeville operates two (2) routes with 45 minute service with several hours less service Monday to Saturday and no Sunday service.

The question is would free transit equate to an increase in ridership? That would be the assumption but not necessarily a guarantee. Orangeville's free transit project would substantiate that free means more riders. However, a solid, sustainable, good area coverage, decent frequency and a user-friendly system also needs to be considered. With both our service populations being identical, Mr. Mousley would say without a doubt that Stratford offers an exceptional service delivery model when comparing the two.

The bigger hurdle with municipalities that have a system and going to a free service has always been who makes up for the operational revenue shortfall. For Stratford Transit, losing fare revenue and being absorbed through local tax levy would be approximately .7 of a percentage point (\$650k). As mentioned previously, annual PGT could tremendously offset the loss (about 80% or more based on current data). There could also be some additional savings with the removal of repairs to fareboxes, staff resources for cash deposits and Brinks retrieval, and printing of passes, tickets and transfers. Staff would estimate that this would be approximately \$100,000.00 in savings annually.

What if Stratford's ridership doubled? Could we manage capacity? Or are we passing customers at bus stops due to buses being overcrowded? This is common in cities like London at peak times especially with the University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College students and numerous buses passing them as there is no room. This could be looked at as a good problem and good proactive planning is important (have a backup plan). Orangeville has needed to charter a regular school bus during peak times to handle capacity.

Vanni Azzano inquired if there was any data that indicates that free transit takes cars off the road. Mr. Mousley stated that there is no data on this. As much as you would hope people would leave their cars at home, there is no guarantee.

Mike Sullivan stated that he would prefer to see free transit city-wide, however questioned if starting with students would be a good first step. Mr. Mousley suggested following what Orangeville did and running a pilot program, starting with free transit for a six month period. He recommended that looking ahead to 2027 to do a six month pilot may be an option the City could try and then assess the data.

Mike Mousley is no longer present at the meeting at 5:06 p.m.

## **5. Working Group Updates:**

### **Ecological Working Group:**

Craig Merkley provided the following updates at the meeting and was available to answer questions:

- There have been two weed pulls in TJ Dolan since the last meeting. Students and volunteers also planted 425 trees, shrubs and native plants. The "stay on trail" signs have also been posted along the trails;
- There was also a buckthorn pull on the north side of the river near the cemetery with volunteers and members of the SDSS Eco Club.
- Mr. Merkley started delivering a "do's and don'ts" flyer to properties that back onto TJ Dolan. The Parks and Forestry Manager has agreed to mail the remaining flyers along with a letter from the City of Stratford;
- The Parks Department has budget funds remaining and will have UTRCA treat the large buckthorn trees in TJ Dolan and then replant the area;
- More boardwalks for TJ Dolan are currently being built at SDSS with a final cost of approximately \$1,800.00;
- The Eco Working Group will look at arranging for a staff member from UTRCA and the City to attend an upcoming meeting to discuss issues with salt use.

Felicity Sutcliffe will forward the notes to all E&E members from the working group's November 3, 2025 meeting.

### **Community Education & Engagement Working Group (CEEWG):**

The CEEWG provided a written update to members with the agenda package. Mike Sullivan provided the following updates at the meeting and was available for questions:

- Top Ten List is scheduled for the January 21, 2026 Climate Conversation Event and the working group will be assisting with displays;
- The working group will continue to work on updating the Gardening Naturally book. Once a draft is complete, Julia Schneider will send it out to E&E members. The working group has reached out to local schools to inquire if there are students interested in also helping with the book.

### **6. Supervisor of Waste Operations Update**

Emily Skelding, Supervisor of Waste Operations, provided the following updates:

- The City has just received a contract from Circular Materials to continue the recycling depot at the landfill and it has been approved by Council;
- Council approved sending the non-eligible blue box recycling to Bluewater;
- Staff has been working closely with Emterra and the rollout of their recycling carts, which will start mid-November;
- The Recycle Coach app that Stratford residents currently use has an agreement with Circular Materials. Circular Materials will be updating all the information for the app so all information will be correct;
- The landfill is receiving a large amount of leaves for composting;
- Some of the pumpkins from the annual pumpkin parade were picked up by staff to be composted at the landfill;
- Some of the asphalt removed from Delamere Avenue and Downie Street is being repurposed to build new road at the landfill site;

### **7. E&E Motions Update**

Vicky Trotter reviewed the motion updates that were distributed to members in the agenda package.

- The Ask First Policy recommendation has been forwarded on to the November 10, 2025 Committee agenda and will follow on to the November 24, 2025 Council agenda and will most likely be referred back to staff;
- Staff is waiting on the last bill for the TJ Dolan boardwalks from SDSS;
- The 2026 budget process is currently being undertaken and the E&E Committee will be informed once their 2026 budget is approved;
- A management report is being drafted regarding the request to have an Indigenous representative on the E&E Committee;
- The Terracycle box for the Stratford Library was ordered and dropped off at the Library on behalf of E&E;
- Ms. Trotter has reached out to staff to gather information regarding salt reduction and current procedures and will be drafting a report for Council.

## **8. Business Arising from Previous Minutes**

### **8.1 Climate Conversations Update**

Felicity Sutcliffe reported that Climate Momentum organized a meeting in October with a speaker from Alliance for a Livable Ontario (ALO). Discussions focused on housing and there was approximately 40 people in attendance. ALO lobbied Prime Minister Mark Carney and subsequently created a program to address housing called Build Canada Homes which has Federal funds attached to it.

Festival Hydro will no longer be speaking about their new Save on Energy Program for the November 26, 2025 talk. Members are currently trying to find another speaker for that night.

Christine Ritsma will be doing a series of three sessions at the Local, which was requested by students. The series will revolve around portion control, cooking and what cuts of meat to buy.

### **8.2 2025 E&E Project Review & Budget Discussion**

Vicky Trotter reported that there are still a few projects outstanding:

- Boot brush signage/structures (going to the Parks Board for final approval on December 1, 2025)
- TJ Dolan entrance sign (going to the Parks Board for final approval on December 1, 2025)

The invoice for the plantings of the native plugs came in significantly over budget, leaving a shortfall of \$1,600.00.

The committee suggested only purchasing four (4) boot brush signs, instead of the original amount of six (6) to reduce the cost. Vanni Azzano suggested that the original UTRCA staff member who created the graphics for the TJ Dolan entrance sign could possibly update the graphics and resubmit it for the new sign. This would eliminate approximately \$1,200.00 from the sign cost.

**Motion by** Ken Clarke

**Seconded by** Julia Schneider

**THAT the Energy & Environment Advisory Committee spend up to a maximum of \$6,300.00 to purchase four (4) boot brush signs and pay the deposit for the TJ Dolan entrance sign (less the fee for graphics).  
Carried**

Emily Skelding stated that the landfill has crushed concrete that the Eco Working Group could use in lieu of pea gravel if they would like to take a look at it for future projects.

### **8.3 Request for Indigenous Representative**

Vicky Trotter previously sent out a request to all E&E members asking to provide specific reasons to support their request for an Indigenous representative to join the committee as she is drafting a report to Council. E&E should have strong, valid reasons for requesting an Indigenous representative to join the committee.

Julia Schneider noted that that it is essential that the committee has Indigenous input and acknowledge them as much as possible.

Councillor Burbach stated that Advisory Committee members are residents of Stratford, however, realizes in some cases Council can approve an exemption. She questioned if the Indigenous representative also be from outside of Stratford. Ms. Trotter stated that an exemption in this instance could potentially



be an option. Ms. Trotter noted that there will be some considerations to keep in mind for an Indigenous representative such as their availability to participate and attend monthly meetings, possible remuneration, etc.

Vanni Azzano will share some information with Ms. Trotter from the UTRCA and stated that Council will need to send a formal request from the City asking if a member would join the committee. Ms. Trotter noted that even if Council sends a request, a possible meeting with an Elder would be necessary to discuss if an Indigenous member would be willing to assist the committee.

Ms. Trotter stated that some municipalities, instead of having an Indigenous representative on each committee, they have an Indigenous representative that the City can go to with specific projects to gain an Indigenous perspective.

Mike Sullivan stated that even though the original motion does not address remuneration, he would support it if an Indigenous representative was willing to join the committee. Ms. Trotter stated that this information can be added to the report, as staff will include various options for Council to consider.

## **9. New Business**

### **9.1 Corporate Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP)**

Mike Sullivan had previously requested Councillor Burbach e-mail the committee the CEEP. Mr. Sullivan has asked E&E members to review the report for discussion at the December E&E meeting. Members can raise any questions they may have, as well as provide comments.

Mr. Sullivan inquired if there is an intent to create a Community Energy and Emissions Report. Councillor Burbach stated that there is not a plan at this time, however, with additional staff in the future, this may be part of their responsibility.

## **10. Upcoming Events**

- Cow Power Mixer – November 27, 2025 (The Parlour 4:30-6:00 p.m.)
- What Can YOU Do to Help With Climate Change (E&E) – January 21, 2026 (City Hall 7-9 p.m.)
- Plant Based Cooking Event (SDSS Eco Club/The Local) – April 8, 2026 (The Local 7-9 p.m.)

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Energy & Environment Advisory Committee will be held on Thursday, December 4, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., Rotary Complex – Mansbridge Room, 353 McCarthy Road W., Stratford ON

**12. Adjournment**

**Motion by** Ken Clarke

**Seconded by** Vanni Azzano

**THAT the November 6, 2025 Energy & Environment Advisory Committee meeting adjourn. Carried**

Meeting Start Time: 4:00 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 6:02 P.M.