

<b>To:</b>	Warden Milne and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	April 11, 2024
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	CAOR-CW-10-24
<b>Title:</b>	Climate Change Initiatives Update April 2024
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<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Randy Scherzer
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	
<b>Status:</b>	

## Recommendation

1. That Report CAOR-CW-10-24 regarding an update on climate change projects, including the Tri-County Green Development Standards project, Experimental Acres Program, the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, and investigating potential opportunities associated with the Green Economy Hub, be received for information; and
2. That staff be directed to forward information on the Green Economy Hub to Grey County member municipalities, as well as neighbouring counties and municipalities, to inform and gauge interest regarding the Green Economy Hub.

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Council about several initiatives the Climate Change Team are working on.

- Staff are in the process of hosting information sessions and feedback workshops with municipal staff, the development industry, the public and other stakeholders on the Green Development Standards project with Dufferin and Wellington.
- Experimental Acres is a collaboration with Grey Agricultural Services that provides farmers with support to test new practices that aim to improve soil health and increase carbon capture on farms. Farms have been selected for the 2024 cohort.
- The ORCCA (Ontario Resource Center for Climate Adaptation) Community Outreach & Engagement Program provides cohort-style learning and capacity support for municipalities. Grey County is participating in this program to meaningfully engage with community partners to begin work on a Community Climate Adaptation Plan. There is no cost to the County to participate in this program.

- Green Economy Hubs use a cohort approach to work with local businesses to set and achieve sustainability targets — bringing together, supporting, and celebrating businesses as they achieve their goals. Staff are seeking direction to continue to participate in a working group exploring the feasibility of launching of a local Green Economy Hub.

## Background and Discussion

### Part 1: Tri-County Green Development Standards

The Tri-County Green Development Standards (GDS) project is a collaborative initiative between Grey, Dufferin, and Wellington Counties to create consistent Green Development Standards that are informed by best practices, existing building credential programs, and local input from municipalities, industry, and residents. The Tri-County GDS will establish a consistent framework across the Counties making it easier for the development industry to meet and incorporate the standards into their projects.

Green Development Standards are a set of principles that guide sustainable development and establish criteria to be incorporated into development proposal based on local priorities. These standards can be; at the building level (e.g. energy efficiency measures, sustainable building materials), at the site plan level (e.g. stormwater infiltration features, native and drought resistant plants), and/or at the neighbourhood level (e.g. sidewalks, cross walks and other active transportation infrastructure to support more active transportation).

Information sessions for municipal staff have been hosted in Grey, Dufferin and Wellington Counties. An information session for the development industry, utilities and conservation authorities will be held on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Public engagement is ongoing in the three Counties. Staff have also connected with indigenous communities about how and if they are interested in consultation regarding this project. Further engagement sessions for municipal staff and the development industry will be hosted in the coming months. Comments received to date have been a mixture of both positive comments and constructive suggestions about what should be considered as part of the Green Development Standards.

Striking the right balance between setting mandatory standards which will require enforcement and creating voluntary standards and policies that encourage more sustainable and energy efficient development is key to the project's success. The consultation and engagement sessions with municipalities, developers, the public, and other community partners throughout the course of the project will be very important to informing these decisions.

Once the input has been collected, staff will work with our consultants to prepare a draft of the Green Development Standards. We anticipate hosting additional sessions to provide feedback on the draft Green Development Standards in the fall of 2024.

More information as well as updates about this project are available on the [Green Development Standards](#) webpage. Council can also subscribe to the public e-mail updates from this page.

# Part 2: Experimental Acres

## Background

The Experimental Acres pilot was developed as a part of Guelph-Wellington Our Food Future, a project funded by Infrastructure Canada. The County of Wellington facilitated the program in Wellington and Dufferin Counties in 2022, and Grey County joined in 2023. More information on last year's projects can be found in the [2023 Experimental Acres Project Outlines](#). In 2024, Grey County is collaborating with Grey Agricultural Services to deliver the program.

Experimental Acres provides farmers with support to test new practices that aim to improve soil health and increase carbon capture on farms. Support includes financial support of up to \$3,000 per farm plus soil testing, and networking opportunities. The program supports implementation of Action 3: Capacity Building in Sustainable Agricultural Best Practices in *Going Green in Grey*, the County's climate action plan. It aims to support farmers in implementing new practices which can build soil health and potentially capture carbon. Examples of projects include cover cropping, silvopasture, rotational grazing systems, tarping to avoid tillage, intercropping, livestock bedding trials, vertical farming, no-till establishment of crops, companion planting and more.

## Program Promotion

Application intake occurred from February 2 to February 23. The program was promoted through the following channels:

- Grey-Bruce Farmers Week (January 3-9, 2024) including booth interactions with Grey County staff;
- Direct emails to 550 agricultural producers who had provided their emails through the Connect ON database and 100 members of the Soil and Crop Association;
- Posted as a header on Climate Action page on Grey County website;
- County social media (when Experimental Acres applications opened on February 2 and Canadian Agriculture Day on February 13) as well as three posts by Grey Ag Services
- Presentation to the Agricultural Advisory Committee (February 15)

## Evaluation Process

The program was scoped to provide financial support for six projects- the same number as in 2023, as well as ongoing testing at one farm. 18 applications were received. To determine successful participants, a selection committee was established, composed of staff from the Grey County Climate Change Team and Grey Agricultural Services. All identifying information was removed from each application before circulation to the selection committee.

The selection committee used the following criteria to assess each application:

- Is the budget realistic for the project?
- Is the plan feasible within one growing season?
- Does the practice reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
- Is the outcome of the project measurable?

- Can it be replicated on other farms?
- Is the practice new to the producer?
- Is the project innovative, novel, or experimental?
- Does the practice align with one or more of the following: i) Keeping Roots in the Ground, ii) Maintaining Green Cover, iii) Integrating Animals into the Rotation, iv) Reducing Mechanical Intervention or v) Increasing Biodiversity?

In addition, farm size was considered to ensure that the projects selected would be applicable and relevant to different farm scales.

## Successful Applicants

Based on scoring of the above criteria, the following participants were selected to participate in the 2024 Experimental Acres program. In 2024, there are participants from small, medium, and large-scale farms, as indicated below. More details about their individual project are attached to this report.

- Interseeding Red Clover on to Corn - Peter Kotzeff, Township of Chatsworth, Farm Size: >400 acres, Test Area: 50 acres
- Interseeding Corn with Clovers and Overwintering Forage Mix – Devan Penney, Municipality of West Grey, Farm Size: < 50 acres
- Later Surface Application of Liquid Manure – Appinbrook Farms Ltd., Municipality of West Grey, Farm Size: 150 – 400 acres; Test Area: 40 acres
- Silvopasture/Rotational Grazing - Braided Dalea Farm, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Farm Size: <50 acres, Test Size: 3 acres
- Using Wool Pellets as a Slow-Release Fertilizer and Water Retention Method - All Sorts Acres, Municipality of West Grey - Farm Size: < 50 acres, Test Area: 2.5 acres
- Cross Seeding Forage Grasses in a Buffer Strip - Vinegar Hill Farm, Grey Highlands - Farm Size: >400 acres; Test Area: ~6 acres
- Bale Grazing Sheep – Black Sheep Farm, Chatsworth, - Farm Size: <50 acres, Test Area: 6 acres. (Ongoing testing only)

## Next Steps

Grey Agricultural Services is currently in the process of having initial meetings with each participant to confirm the details of the pilot project, selecting test site location, and finalizing agreements with each farmer. Once finalized, participants will start their project. Over the season, the Grey Agricultural Services Program Coordinator will conduct meetings and farm visits periodically to monitor the pilot and conduct soil tests.

Grey Ag Services and Grey County staff will profile each project and share the results and lessons learned. Staff also plan to share the results at Grey-Bruce Farmers Week and other agriculture sector events.

# Part 3: ORCCA Community Outreach & Engagement Program – supporting the Climate Change Adaptation Plan project.

## About the Program

The ORCCA (Ontario Resource Center for Climate Adaptation) Community Outreach & Engagement Program provides cohort-style learning and capacity support for Ontario communities working on an adaptation-focused engagement initiative. It is a project of ICLEI Canada who were instrumental in assisting with Grey County’s Climate Action Plan “Going Green in Grey.” Grey County submitted a project application to ORCCA and they accepted our project. Over the course of one-year (March 2024 – February 2025), Grey County will receive support at no cost to the County from ORCCA team members including capacity building, subject matter experts, workshops and lecture-style presentations, tools and resources, connections and networking.

## Grey County’s Adaptation Initiative

The Community Outreach & Engagement Program is designed to support an initiative that is a priority for the participating organization. Through this program Grey County’s goal is to conduct meaningful engagement with community groups and partners on the early stages of creating and implementing a Community Climate Adaptation Plan. The key audiences include relevant departments within Grey County, member municipalities, public sector organizations such as Conservation Authorities and the Public Health, Indigenous Groups, the agriculture industry, and community climate action groups, etc. Staff will prepare a report to Council on what we heard and the findings from the ORCCA program.

Developing a Climate Adaptation Plan is one of the key next steps identified in Going Green in Grey. “Going Green in Grey” focuses on climate mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon to slow the progress of climate change. A climate adaptation plan outlines how our community will respond to the impacts of climate of change that we are already experiencing, and we predict to increase in the future. The plan could include predictive local climate models, risk and vulnerability assessments, and actions we could take to reduce the negatives impacts of a changing climate. Some of the actions outlined in “Going Green in Grey” have benefits for both mitigation and adaptation including:

- Forest, Habitat and Biodiversity Protection and Expansion
- Conservation and Protection of Wetlands
- Capacity Building in Sustainable Agriculture
- Green Standards for New Buildings
- Residential and Non-Residential Building Retrofits
- Renewable and Emerging Energy Technologies

To create Grey County’s Community Climate Adaptation Plan, we will be working through ICLEI’s [Building Adaptive and Resilient Communities](#) (BARC) milestone process. Staff will begin by connecting with member municipalities and community partners and identify champions for climate adaption. Staff will assemble existing research, data, plans and resources such as

natural asset inventories, asset management plans, vulnerability and risk assessments, flood mapping, emergency response plans, climate impacts and projections. Staff will also identify gaps that need to be filled. Staff will prepare an application to FCMs [Local Leadership for Climate Adaptation](#) funding program which is anticipated to launch in spring 2024. Matching funds for this application were allocated in the 2024 budget.

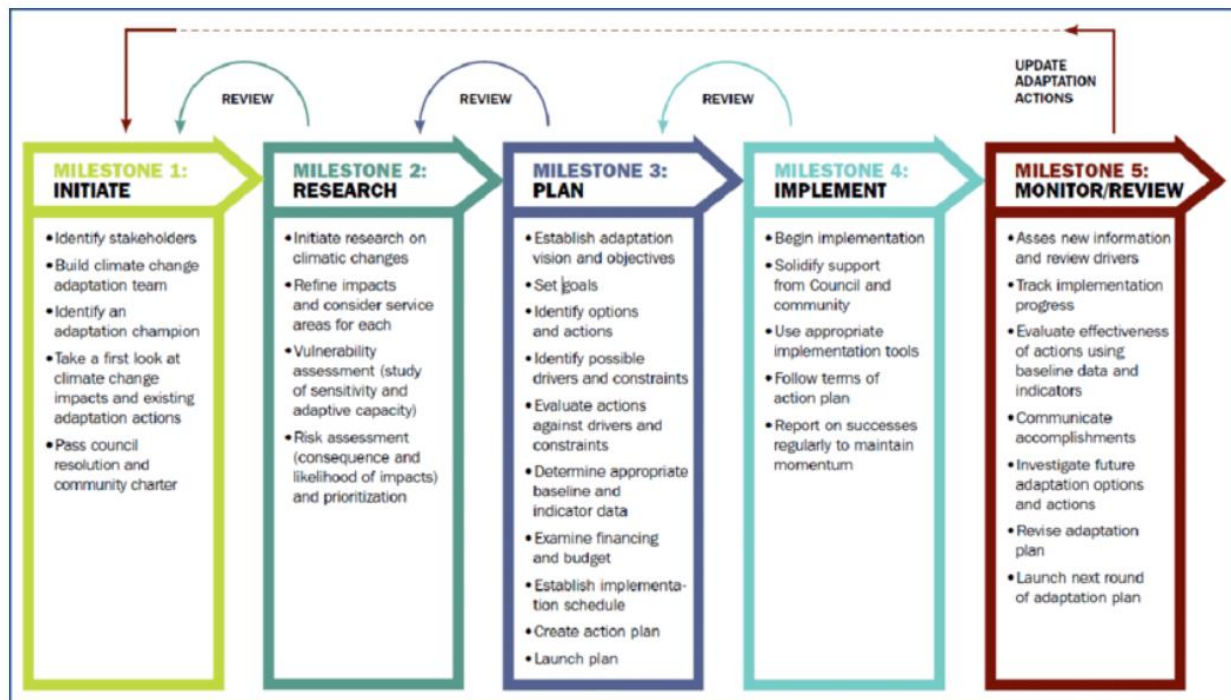


Figure 1: ICLEI's BARC Milestone Process

Through ORCCA's Community Outreach & Engagement Program staff intend to progress to the beginning of Milestone 3 including:

- Formalizing partnership and data sharing agreements
- Strategizing to fill data and information gaps
- Hosting a stakeholder workshop to get input on vulnerability and risk assessments.
- Collectively developing the vision, goals and objectives for the Community Climate Adaptation Plan.

Staff anticipate the Community Climate Adaptation Plan will be completed in late 2025 or early 2026. Timing will depend on staff time and resources available for the project. A successful application to FCM would accelerate the timeline and allow for a larger scope for the project.

## Commitments

To participate in this program Grey County agrees to work with ORCCA to advance our project (~6 hours per month), participate in meetings, workshops and webinars, and share learnings with the cohort and other stakeholders. Developing a Climate Adaptation Plan is identified as one of the key next steps in "Going Green in Grey" and funding has been allocated in the 2024 budget. Outreach and engagement with stakeholders and, rightsholders, and community groups

is the first step of this process. Participating in this program will provide some efficiencies. Staff will be able to use tools, techniques and resources that already exist rather than creating them. Staff can avoid potential pitfalls and mistakes by learning from others experience. Staff will benefit from guidance and coaching from ORCCA, to get immediate feedback and improve our engagement strategies and tactics over the course of the project.

ICLEI Canada will assign an ORCCA staff member to support Grey County on the engagement initiative. They will provide free and direct one-on-one capacity building (including providing draft products, agendas, workshop strategies, templates, guidance as needed) support to the Corporation of the County of Grey to a maximum 64 hours over the course of 12-months. Through the program, Grey can access a variety of tools and resources as well as experts and best practices in the field of climate change adaptation and resilience and community engagement and outreach. ORCCA will facilitate opportunities for networking and collaboration across Great Lakes Basin and Ontario communities and organizations and offer opportunities to share experiences and lessons learned through the program with a national audience.

## Part 4: Green Economy Hub

### What is a Green Economy Hub?

Green Economy Canada works with community partners to launch and grow Green Economy Hubs — a proven model for engaging local businesses in taking climate action and building sustainability into their operations. Green Economy Hubs use a cohort approach to work with local businesses to set and achieve sustainability targets — bringing together, supporting, and celebrating businesses as they achieve their goals. While each Green Economy Hub is adapted to meet the needs of the local community, all Hubs follow the same four core approaches: community-led, business-focused, revenue generating, and target driven. The Hub is usually operated by a local environmental non-profit and provides services for a fee to the local businesses who choose to participate in the Hub. Other operating models are also possible. Businesses of any size or sector can join the Hub, but the services are geared for small and medium enterprises, who generally don't have sustainability experts on staff, and have a strong business case for sustainability. A Green Economy Hub strengthens the local green economy by providing education and creating demand for sustainable goods and services. There are currently 8 Hubs in Canada, 6 of which are in Ontario, as well as a National Hub. Grey-Bruce is the only region in Southern Ontario not currently serviced by a local Hub.

### Progress to date

Discussions about creating a local Green Economy Hub have been circulating in the community since 2021. The Institute for Southern Georgian Bay hosted an event “Achieving Sustainability through a Greener Economy” in October 2023. Following that event, a working group formed to discuss the feasibility of a local Green Economy Hub. The working group includes staff representatives from Grey County, The Town of The Blue Mountains, Town of Collingwood, The Institute for Southern Georgian Bay, RTO7, Blue Mountain Resort, MacLean Engineering, Climate Action Now Network, Georgian Bay Forever, Wasaga Climate Action Team, and the Collingwood Climate Action Team. Broader engagement with the business community has not yet taken place.

The Town of The Blue Mountains is hosting a [Sustainability Summit](#) for local businesses on April 25th. Green Economy Canada will present, and members of the working group will facilitate a discussion to gauge interest from the business community. One possibility is to invite a pilot cohort of local businesses to join the National Hub. These businesses could immediately begin their sustainability journey with services delivered by Green Economy Canada, while enjoying the benefits of a local network. If the pilot is successful, it could lay the groundwork for a local Hub with services delivered by a local organization. The Green Economy Hub aligns with RTO7's work to become a Sustainable Tourism destination through the [Green Step](#) program. Tourism businesses could use Green Steps assessment to understand their sustainability profile and then use the tools and services provided by the Green Economy Hub to improve their sustainability scores.

## Role of Grey County

The Green Economy Hub is a community led initiative. Staff recommends continuing participation in the working group, and assisting with convening and facilitating meetings with stakeholders to understand the feasibility and potential of a Green Economy Hub. Staff will continue to reach out and engage with colleagues and connections to provide information about the Green Economy Hub and get feedback about local business sustainability needs. Leaning on Economic Development, including the Business Enterprise Centre, staff will communicate information and gauge interest from businesses who see potential in joining the Hub.

Through the Green Economy Hub, Grey County has the opportunity to engage the business community in the priority actions identified in "Going Green in Grey," such as Action 5: Waste Diversion, Action 7: Zero-Emission Vehicles, Action 13: Non-residential Building Energy Efficiency Retrofits, and Action 14: Renewable and Emerging Energy Technologies. The Green Economy Hub can also serve key sectors: Action 3: Sustainable Agriculture, and Action 20: Sustainable Tourism. Perhaps most importantly, by delivering education and services to the business community, Green Economy Hub supports Action 19: Climate Action Engagement.

## Agreements

The agreement for the Codes Acceleration Fund with NRCan (Tri-County Green Development Standards project) was finalized on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Grey County has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Dufferin County and Wellington County regarding the Green Development Standards project.

A Service Agreement was developed and signed in January 2024 with Grey Agriculture Services to deliver the Experimental Acres program. Agreements with the individual farmers selected to participate in the program are in the process of development. Should Grey County not be able to reach an agreement with any of the selected farms, another farm project will be selected from among the qualified applicants.

Grey County has entered into an agreement with ICLEI Canada to participate in the ORCCA Community Outreach and Engagement Program. The mutual commitments in that agreement are summarized in this report.



## Financial and Resource Implications

Eligible expenses associated with the Green Development Standards project, including staff time and consultant fees, will be expensed to Codes Acceleration Fund through NRCan as per the agreement to a maximum of \$445,600 in addition to the funding contributions from each of the County project partners. The funding from NRCan runs until March 31, 2027.

\$23,000 was approved in the 2024 to support the Experimental Acres program. This includes a fee-for-service for Grey Agricultural Services to deliver the program (\$8,600) as well as the funding to reimburse farmers for project costs (\$14,400). Some staff time from the Climate Change Outreach and Engagement Coordinator is also dedicated to this project.

There is no cost to participate in the ORCCA Community Outreach & Engagement program. \$50,000 was approved in the 2024 budget for climate adaptation planning. Any program expenses (e.g. hosting a stakeholder workshop) will be drawn from this budget. Staff anticipate applying for FCM funding as soon as the program becomes available. Staff time from the Climate Change Initiatives Manager and the Climate Change Outreach and Engagement Coordinator will be dedicated to this project as outlined in the agreement.

There are currently no financial costs associated with the Green Economy Hub. Staff time of the Climate Change Initiatives Manager to continue to participate in the working group and inform stakeholders about the hub.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal : Deputy CAO, EDTC
  - AODA Compliance (describe)
  - Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets (describe)
- External (list)

## Appendices and Attachments

CAOR-CW-10-24 Descriptions of Experimental Acres Projects 2024