



Committee Report

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	February 10, 2022
Subject / Report No:	PDR-CW-06-22 / University of Guelph Student Projects
Title:	'Grey County Green Development Standards' and 'Density is Not a Dirty Word Guide' Projects
Prepared by:	Scott Taylor and Linda Swanston
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All Municipalities in Grey County
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW27-22; Endorsed by County Council February 24, 2022 per Resolution CC19-22

Recommendation

1. That Report PDR-CW-06-22 regarding the two University of Guelph student projects entitled 'Grey County Green Development Standards' and 'Density is Not a Dirty Word Guide' be received for information.

Executive Summary

The County is partnering with two teams of students from the University of Guelph Masters of Rural Planning and Development program to undertake two projects in Grey County. The first project, Grey County Green Development Standards, is taking direction from the County's draft Climate Change Action Plan to explore options for a green development standard in Grey. A second project, Density is Not a Dirty Word Guide, will examine approaches to implementing additional density in our communities, including educational and financial components. These studies are being completed as part of the students' course work for their Masters of Rural Planning and Development program, and will benefit the County and member municipalities. Outreach in the form of stakeholder interviews or surveys, in addition to background research and a review of other municipal approaches, will be completed to inform these projects. The students will complete and present their findings in April 2022.

Background and Discussion

County Planning staff are partnering with students from University of Guelph Masters of Rural Planning and Development program on two new projects.

The first project will involve a team of students researching and making recommendations on a Green Development Standard (GDS) for the County. As the County nears completion of our first Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), one of the draft recommendations of the Plan is to create a GDS. While there are other green development standards nationally and across the province, County staff wanted to further explore what a 'Made-in-Grey' approach would look like given our geography, climate, and two-tier municipal structure. The project will focus on recommendations around governance and implementation, leveraging existing technical standards for low-carbon green development such as LEED, the Canadian Green Buildings Council Zero Carbon Standard, Passive House, and others. Should the finalized draft County Climate Change Action Plan be adopted by County Council, staff will issue a request for proposals (RFP) for the formal development of the GDS. Staff see this student project as providing valuable background information to inform both the RFP and the ultimate Grey County GDS.

This model of a student-led project informing a future consultant-driven process is not without precedent in Grey and was used a few years ago on the CCAP. At that time a team of University of Guelph students completed background research and made high-level recommendations on a Climate Change Action Plan for Grey. The student project was later used to inform the RFP and was provided to ICLEI Canada as part of their work on the CCAP.

The second project, involving another team of students, would create a guide titled 'Density is Not a Dirty Word' for the County. Grey County is currently experiencing an increase in residential growth rates and an increase in the cost of housing. Based on the direction from the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the County's own Official Plan, Recolour Grey, the County is promoting a wide range of housing types at densities which make efficient use of land and servicing infrastructure. These housing types and densities can cause concern within our communities. In some cases, members of the public have raised questions about the need for such density, or even 'blamed' developers for 'trying to squeeze as many units as they can out of a property'. This Guide to be created by the students will explore;

- differing municipal approaches to accommodating density,
- the benefits of density from a planning and affordable housing perspective, and
- the intersection between density, asset management, and municipal finance.

County staff see the Guide as an educational tool about why well-planned density is not only desirable, but also a necessity. The Guide can be read as an entire document, or via standalone components such as infographics.

These projects and the study processes will both include;

- completing a policy review of other municipal approaches to the two subject matters,
- reviewing existing County and Municipal policies and background documents,
- consulting with local stakeholders across the County to get their input on the projects, and
- recommending policy approaches (in the case of the GDS) and creating a Guide (in the case of the Density project).

Staff are cognizant that the scope of these studies need to consider the County as a whole, while also recognizing that each of our communities are unique in their composition and needs.

Although these two projects are distinct from one another and will be separate teams of students, there are also subject matter linkages. Developing at densities which make efficient use of land, servicing, and building materials, will also contribute to being 'green' and achieving some of the objectives of the CCAP and GDS.

These projects will be conducted in a remote fashion to ensure that all public health requirements are complied with, given the changing nature of the pandemic. The student teams are working within a very limited timeframe (the projects need to be completed by early April 2022), which is partnered with their workload from other classes as well.

As part of these projects, County staff will supply background resources to the students and connect them to County, Municipal, as well as the development community and other stakeholders for their input on these projects.

The County has been lucky enough to partner with the Universities of Guelph, Toronto, and Waterloo on similar projects on many other occasions, and in all instances received high quality results. The results of these past studies have been incorporated into Recolour Grey and are informing the Climate Change Action Plan.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislative considerations at this time.

Financial and Resource Implications

The work completed by the student consulting teams is without cost to the County, and done as part of the coursework for their master's degree. County staff are grateful to the students' efforts in this regard, and would note that having to pay a consultant to complete similar work would likely cost between \$25,000 - \$35,000 for each project.

Relevant Consultation

Internal: Economic Development, Housing, and Planning staff will all be consulted as part of these studies.

External: Municipal staff, Developers, stakeholders such as climate action teams and the public.

Appendices and Attachments

None