



Ecology Ottawa's climate change lead, Charles Hodgson, left, and executive director Graham Saul will be keeping their eyes on Ottawa's new city council and its environmental policies. *DARREN BROWN/OTTAWA CITIZEN*

CLIMATE AND THE CIVIC RACE

Most candidates say city has a role to play

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Climate change is an urgent issue for the municipal government and the city should go beyond its plan to address air quality and climate change, according to the majority of council candidates who responded to a survey by Ecology Ottawa.

Responses from 66 candidates, more than half of those running, are to be released in a report on Saturday. Nine out of 10 respondents said the city has a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and 82 per cent want to go further than the city's new Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan.

There were, however, six candidates who said the city has no role to play in fighting climate change. Part of the reason for those responses is "a misconception climate change isn't a municipal issue," said Graham Saul, executive director of Ecology Ottawa. "When in reality, it is, very much so."

"There's always going to be a percentage of people who don't want to spend money on anything and who don't want to invest in building a better and more efficient Ottawa," he said. "But there's broad-based support within Ottawa. The responses of the candidates reflect a popular desire to see action on this issue."

But what can a municipal government do to combat climate change?

BIG GOALS

Ottawa's new climate change plan was passed by council last May. But much of any action on the plan, and voting on some of its specific ideas at budget time, will be up to the councillors elected on Oct. 27.

Some candidates said they want to go beyond the plan's goal of reducing GHG emissions by 20 per cent per capita from 2012 levels by 2024. Once population growth is factored in, that would amount to an overall 12-per-cent reduction.

The target is more modest than the goals within the first plan, which the city fell well short of.

"Ottawa is among the least ambitious when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions," said Tobi Nussbaum, a Rideau-Rockcliffe candidate who last week released a climate change platform, which points to Montreal and Toronto's reduction goals of 30 per cent by 2020, compared to 1990 levels. "We should raise the bar and there are

concrete things we can do to get there."

MEASURABLE, CITY GOALS

Several candidates suggested annual reporting on progress toward the overall goal, and more measurable short-term quantifiers. Others, including Nussbaum, want specific reduction targets for city operations including its buildings and fleet of vehicles.

"You have to lead by example," said David Chernushenko, who has worked in sustainability and is running for re-election in Capital ward after first being elected in 2010.

Right now, Ottawa doesn't seem to be doing enough to meet even its modest goals and it's important to be realistic, said Chernushenko. He wrote in his survey response that reductions need to be closer to 80 per cent by 2050 "but that will require a major shift in opinion from my colleagues on council and their constituents (some of mine too)."

NEW FINANCING

One of the "concrete" ideas Nussbaum wants to pick up is a residential energy retrofit program, similar to one in Halifax.

He wants to bring a similar pilot program to Ottawa, to help reduce energy use from heating or cooling buildings by offering homeowners loans paid back at rates equal to or lower than the energy savings.

"It's pretty brilliant and it gets over one of the main obstacles of why people tend not to invest in energy retrofits, which is a fear that they're not going to get their money back," Nussbaum said.

Ontario changed legislation two years ago to let municipalities lend money to homeowners who want to boost energy efficiency, complete retrofits or do similar work. The financing mechanism was traditionally used for sewer, sidewalk and other infrastructure upgrades, with the cost of the work being added to the property tax bill of the owner who benefits. The cost can be spread over a number of years and if the property is sold, the payments can be transferred to the new owner.

Ottawa is now studying how retrofit programs with such financing have worked in about a dozen states, as well as Halifax, Toronto and Vancouver. City staff, who are due to report back to council with recommendations on the financing next fall, initially found risks including risk of loan default, liability for work, impacts on the

city's credit rating and the need for startup funding.

'STOP WASTING MONEY'

Would a majority of new councillors go for an idea that could require some city money, at least up front? "You can also frame it in another way and say stop wasting money on it," says Ecology Ottawa climate lead Charles Hodgson. "Stop wasting money on inefficient buildings."

Candidates had some other development ideas. In Rideau-Vanier, candidate Marc Aubin is suggesting a "climate lens" be applied to any city decision, so councillors would be presented with emissions or other information before voting on developments, for example.

A green-roof policy similar to Toronto's should be pursued, according to Somerset candidate Jeff Morrison. Toronto requires green roofs, which reduce energy consumption and have other environmental benefits, on new commercial, institutional and some residential developments of a certain size.

SMART COMMUTES

While the second phase of light-rail transit is hanging on funding from senior levels of government, Saul said there are some other ways to boost the sustainability of transportation in Ottawa.

More community design that doesn't rely on car ownership is "critical," he said, adding areas including Orléans, Kanata and Barrhaven must become more like "satellite cities" instead of "bedroom communities."

Stephen Blais, running for re-election in Cumberland, wrote in his survey response that he wants to try to attract more high paying jobs to the area to reduce commutes. He said he's also asked upper levels of government to help build more high-occupancy-vehicle lanes to reduce single-occupant cars.

Saul said council could do more to encourage electric vehicles, beyond the few public charging stations now available, including one at city hall. Ottawa's climate change plan earlier this year said there's "significant opportunity" to increase stations to encourage public uptake. Partnerships with local groups, giving ownership incentives and public education are among the ways to make that happen, Saul said.

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