

STAFF REPORT: Office of The Chief Administrative Officer

REPORT TO: Council

MEETING DATE: October 12, 2011

REPORT NO.: CAO.11.05

SUBJECT: **Strategic Plan Update and Priority Setting**

PREPARED BY: Troy Speck
Chief Administrative Officer

A. Recommendation

THAT Council receive Report CAO.11.05 entitled “Strategic Plan Update and Priority Setting” for their information purposes; and

THAT Council authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to retain the services of a facilitator to conduct a strategic plan update and priority-setting exercise with Council and senior staff, at an upset cost of \$15,000.00.

B. Background

Over the past 2 months, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) has had an opportunity to conduct interviews and discussions with various members of Council, staff and community stakeholders. There is one theme that has emerged through discussions with all groups, and which should be addressed in a timely fashion, ideally in advance of, or as part of, budget discussions for 2012; and that is the issue of clarifying the Town’s strategic direction and priorities.

Strategic Direction

Clear direction is essential to an organization’s effectiveness. Without clear direction, staff may not be sure what work is a priority, and what might be eliminated or delayed. This can lead to concerns regarding workload and an organization trying to be “all things to all people”. One question that has come up in interviews with Council, staff and some community partners has been: “Is the Town trying to do too much?”

Lack of clear direction can lead to staff and Council not being “on the same page” regarding what the organization’s priorities should be. This has been observed in comments from Council that staff need to better understand what council wants; or comments that staff sometimes get ideas to do things that members of Council don’t feel taxpayers really want. Ideally, staff should have a clear understanding of what

Council's priorities are, and build an annual work plan around those priorities, for Council's approval.

As the elected head of the organization and maker of policy, Council must provide clear direction, and that direction must be informed by the experience and expertise of staff. In an organization like the Town, direction often comes in the form of strategic plans, goals and actions that have been developed through various processes and consultations, and approved by Council. In the case of The Town of The Blue Mountains, the organization has a number of strategic plans, most being either recently developed, or currently being developed, including:

- Our Sustainable Path
- The Blue Mountains Strategic Plan (2005)
- Red Hot & Blue: Plan for Economic Prosperity in the Blue Mountains
- The Blue Mountains Official Plan and related 5 Year Review
- Community Improvement Plan

Between the Red Hot & Blue economic development plan and the Sustainable Path alone, there are 66 strategic goals, 194 strategies/objectives, and almost 650 action items. What is lacking is clear direction from Council with respect to which elements, of which plan(s), are the priority in any given year?

The lack of clear direction is further complicated by the fact that there does not appear to be complete consensus among members of Council with regard to the role of certain "key" strategic documents in the Town's planning. For example, in interviews with members of Council, when asked about the Sustainable Path document, responses varied somewhat regarding the role and importance that document should have in Town planning. The Town's existing Strategic Plan was developed in 2005. Even with respect to that document, not all members of the current Council participated in its development, and some feedback was received that even some members who were on Council in 2005 were not able to fully participate in its development.

Accordingly, in order to set the agenda for this Council's term of office, and to provide staff with clear direction upon which they can build their work plans for the next 3 years, it is recommended that Council conduct a review and update of its Strategic Plan, with a goal of identifying and attaining consensus on some clear priorities for the remainder of Council's term. It is also recommended that someone who is both experienced and well qualified in such work would best facilitate such a process. A facilitated process will allow staff to participate thoughtfully in the discussion, rather than being tied up with the design and management of the process. A facilitator is also better positioned to comfortably challenge the assumptions and positions of both staff and Council. It is important that senior staff participate in the review/update process with Council, since they will ultimately be responsible for implementing the priorities. Also, setting direction must take into consideration not only strategy, but also the organization's mandate (ie:

the day-to-day work of providing services to the public, and actions that are legislatively mandated) and how that mandate impacts resources, workload, etc.

The Process

Though the exact nature of the review process should be discussed with the facilitator, the process would likely involve components such as:

- 1) Review of the 2005 Strategic Plan and other strategic documents;
- 2) Updating the environmental scan – much valuable information in this regard will be found in the Sustainable Path document. So, as opposed to conducting a completely new environmental scan, this component may include Council identifying some priorities and then taking those to the community for comment;
- 3) Conduct a Council/senior staff workshop to consider the various strategic documents, community input, and revise the Town's strategic goals and actions, as well as discussing the optimal model of good governance that will guide the Town; and
- 4) Seek consensus on and clarify Council's priorities for the balance of this term.

A process of this nature would likely involve somewhere between 40 and 60 hours work, including preparation, facilitation and reporting, from an experienced strategic planning facilitator. An experienced facilitator could command as much as \$400 per hour, though through negotiation a rate of \$250/hour is attainable. As such, an upset cost of \$15,000 for the process is recommended.

Conclusion

Given the magnitude of time, effort and resources that have gone into developing the Town's various strategic documents referenced above, it is suggested to Council that the *real* cost to the organization would be in having done all of that work, and then not implementing priority actions efficiently. The cost of staff time due to unclear direction can be immense. It is recommended that Council incur this strategic planning cost now to clarify Council's priorities, guide staff, and meet Council and community expectations through the rest of this Council's term.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal # 6 speaks to "Providing a strong, well managed municipal government".

D. Environmental Impact

None identified.

E. Budget Impact

An upset cost of \$15,000. There is currently \$25,000 remaining in the CAO's 2011 budget for professional fees.

F. Attachment

None.

Respectfully submitted,

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