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## **The Regional Municipality of Durham**

### **MINUTES**

#### **SPECIAL MEETING OF**

#### **REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**Thursday, January 25, 2024**

The Council of The Regional Municipality of Durham met in the Council Chambers, Regional Headquarters Building, 605 Rossland Road East, Whitby, Ontario at 9:31 AM. Electronic participation was offered for this meeting.

Regional Chair Henry assumed the Chair.

#### **1. Traditional Territory Acknowledgment**

Regional Chair Henry read the following land acknowledgement:

The Region of Durham exists on lands that the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg inhabited for thousands of years prior to European colonization. These lands are the traditional and treaty territories of the Nations covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama.

We honour, recognize, and respect Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and stewards of the lands and waters on which we have the privilege to live. In our efforts towards reconciliation, we continue to build and strengthen relationships with First Nations, as well as the large Métis communities and growing Inuit communities here in Durham. We commit to learning from Indigenous values and knowledge, building opportunities for collaboration, and recognizing that we are all connected.

#### **2. Roll Call**

The following members were present:

Councillor Anderson

Councillor Ashe

Councillor Barton attended the meeting at 11:10 AM

Councillor Brenner

Councillor Carter left the meeting at 2:20 PM

Councillor Chapman, left the meeting at 2:20 PM

Councillor Collier\* left the meeting at 11:00 AM

Councillor Cook

Councillor Crawford left the meeting at 12:02 PM

Councillor Dies  
Councillor Foster  
Councillor Garrod  
Councillor Jubb\* left the meeting at 2:20 PM  
Councillor Lee  
Councillor Marimpietri, left the meeting at 2:20 PM  
Councillor McDougall  
Councillor Mulcahy left the meeting at 2:20 PM  
Councillor Neal\*  
Councillor Roy  
Councillor Schummer  
Councillor Shahid left the meeting at 2:45 PM  
Councillor Woo attended the meeting at 11:00 AM and left the meeting at 2:20 PM  
Councillor Wotten  
Councillor Yamada left the meeting at 1:18 PM  
Regional Chair Henry

**\* indicates members who participated electronically, all other members participated in person**

All members of Council were present with the exception of Councillors Leahy, Nicholson, and Pickles

### **3. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest made.

### **4. Presentations**

Chair Henry provided opening remarks and thanked members for attending today's Special Council Meeting to provide direction on Durham Region's 2025 Strategic Plan. Chair Henry added that strategic planning is a critical component for all organizations and provides a framework to guide programs and services.

Sandra Austin, Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives, provided opening remarks and advised that Durham Region's Strategic Plan is the guiding document that outlines how the Region delivers service excellence through leadership, collaboration, innovation and environmental stewardship.

Elaine Baxter-Trahair, CAO, provided reflections on the current 2020-2024 Durham Region Strategic Plan, and noted that the plan enabled the Region to make significant advancements in all five goal areas including:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Community Vitality
- Economic Prosperity

- Social Investment
- Service Excellence

E. Baxter-Trahair stated that it is important to continue to communicate these program successes and advised that in March 2023, the Region brought the first Durham Region Strategic Plan Community Dashboard to Council. This public-facing dashboard shows the Region's progress towards achieving the goals, with updates on key performance metrics and trends.

E. Baxter-Trahair advised that the Region is currently collecting 2023 year-end data and plan to bring an update to Council in the Spring.

S. Austin stated that comparable to the current Strategic Plan, the 2025 Plan will be informed by Council's input, by the community through public engagement and by staff conversations.

S. Austin advised that the Region is taking a new approach to strategic planning by applying strategic foresight methodology to help imagine and design possible and preferred futures and noted that this approach is particularly useful when circumstances are "unpredictable".

S. Austin further advised that KerrSmith Design has been contracted to support Council with this work. S. Austin noted that KerrSmith Design is a multidisciplinary research and innovation studio specializing in Foresight and Design with over 25+ years of strategic planning and strategic foresight experience. Over the last several weeks, KerrSmith Design has led members from the Strategic Plan Steering Committee and Advisory Group through the required preparations to bring Council together today.

S. Austin advised that following today's planning workshop, staff will take direction to advance project planning and will continue to execute the engagement phase, which includes launching the community engagement and consultation activities in March. A "What We Heard" report, will be presented to Committee in June 2024 which will summarize all the engagement completed between now and the Spring. The information will be used to develop the Strategic Plan over the summer and staff will bring forward the recommendations to Council for review and approval before the end of 2024.

Councillor Crawford provided comments as one of Council's representatives on the Steering Committee and noted that the committee participated in a number of sessions, and that priorities kept shifting, which is a reflection of the Region's current reality.

4.1 Helen Kerr, Co-President and Nigel Smith, Co-President, KerrSmith Design re:  
Developing Durham Region's 2025 Strategic Plan

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Helen Kerr provided welcome and introductions.

H. Kerr outlined how a Futures Informed Strategy is created and outlined major world events over the past five years.

H. Kerr and S. Austin responded to questions from members of Council with respect to what the level of staff engagement will be in strategic planning, and whether possible “downstream consequences” will be contemplated as part of the strategic planning process.

H. Kerr outlined the Region’s current status in the strategic planning process.

H. Kerr asked Council to participate in an exercise in ‘Understanding the Current Context’ by providing observations about current concerns in the Region. Members noted concerns including homelessness, housing affordability, embracing diversity, media independence, the use of technology, climate change, addiction, food insecurity, mental health, political concerns, prioritization of resources, and cultural shifts.

H. Kerr observed that many of the concerns raised were systemic and interconnected.

Council recessed at 10:50 AM and reconvened at 11:00 AM.

H. Kerr spoke about “Framing the Future We Want” and asked members to make note of what they would like to see in Durham Region in the future. Members provided ideas including being innovative but also thoughtful; sustainability; government funding from all levels of government for what they are responsible for; creating villages and limiting sprawl (intensification in core areas); active transportation; affordable housing mix; partnerships with all levels of government and with community agencies; liveable communities with services, greenspace and infrastructure to support them; strategic provision of services and funding (reduce duplication); vibrant downtowns; a sense of community/kindness; providing leadership towards a civilized, customer centric governance model; and attracting well paying jobs and economic development to the Region.

H. Kerr outlined the process they use which includes looking at a ‘future vision’ which is used as a lens to assess possible choices; ‘exploratory futures’ which are used as a lens to assess possible impacts; and a ‘preferred future’ which can be used for the strategy.

H. Kerr reported on the results of the Strategic Planning survey that Council members completed and asked members to share what they think is missing from the current strategic plan. Members commented on making sure that plans are actionable; looking at what we do not want to be; making sure plans are measurable; resiliency; and keeping things simple and understandable.

A question was raised about whether the Region has been measuring the successes of the current Strategic Plan. S. Austin and E. Baxter-Trahair advised that the extent to which the Region has made progress or delivered on specific actions is measured, there are individual key performance indicators, and the data is available in a publicly accessible dashboard.

Moved by Councillor Anderson, Seconded by Councillor Kerr

(1) That Council recess for lunch.

CARRIED

Council recessed for lunch at 12:02 PM and reconvened at 12:31 PM.

The Clerk conducted a roll call following the recess and all members of Council were present with the exception of Councillors Anderson, Ashe, Crawford, Leahy, Nicholson, and Pickles.

Councillors Anderson and Ashe attended the meeting at 12:36 PM.

H. Kerr spoke about “Developing Strategic Pathways to Achieve our Goals” and outlined the current Strategic Plan goals. H. Kerr advised that most members indicated that they wanted to keep the same goals and asked members to think about how those goals might change moving forward and whether there are other goals that should be addressed. Members formed three break-out groups to discuss the Strategic Plan goals.

Council recessed into break-out groups at 12:40 PM and reconvened at 1:45 PM.

Break-out groups discussed three main areas:

- How the current Strategic Plan goals are impacted by emergent issues
- Identifying any goals that are not currently included in the plan
- Ranking the goals in order of importance

One representative from each group provided a debrief on what was discussed during the break-out session. Representatives advised that discussions occurred with respect to:

- Revitalizing waterfront areas;
- The speed in which we can do business;
- Taking advantage of green energy opportunities;
- Competing with the City of Toronto;

- Aligning Durham Region municipalities;
- Environmentally friendly building techniques;
- Using existing technology to promote green initiatives;
- The risks of Electric Vehicles on roads – building infrastructure to match;
- The need for jobs closer to home;
- Capitalizing on and celebrating diversity;
- The importance of social investments e.g. community events;
- The use of AI technology;
- Focussing funding requests to higher levels of government;
- Housing vulnerable populations;
- Global unrest;
- Liveable communities;
- Corporate partnerships;
- Changing the “Environmental Sustainability” goal to ‘Environmental Responsibility’;
- Active transportation and promoting healthy living;
- Venture capital to keep new business start-ups in the Region and attract new business;
- Social investments for groups in need e.g. seniors;
- The importance of timely communications, measurable outcomes and opportunities for public participation;
- The descriptions for goals need to change to match the ultimate goals;
- Creating a happy and innovative environment for staff so that we can achieve the goals – including using advances in technology, making it clear that mistakes are welcome and innovation encouraged;
- Looking at legislative amendments;
- Government advocacy to gain supports to provide services;
- Economic prosperity should be a lead goal;
- The need to hear from the community and staff about emerging issues; and
- Countering misinformation.

Comments were made with respect to budgeting for strategic initiatives; the need for economic prosperity to achieve all goals; the importance of having some flexibility built into strategic planning; and advocating to other levels of government for funding for priorities that are not under the Region’s financial mandate.

Council recessed at 2:20 PM and reconvened at 2:30 PM.

H. Kerr advised that the timeline for the Strategic Plan needs to be established and it is currently a 5-year plan. H. Kerr asked for input from Council on the timeline. Comments were made with respect to having a 4-year plan with a 1-year offset from the beginning of a term of Council; and that 4 years may be too short to make significant progress on the ambitious goals in the Plan.

A question was raised with respect to how long the timelines are for other municipality's Strategic Plans. H. Kerr advised that some Strategic Plans are for longer time periods with built-in flexibility to make amendments if needed. S. Austin advised that implementation plans could be reviewed before the end of the term for the Plan.

H. Kerr solicited feedback on how the Region can ensure success of the Plan and noted the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Comments were made with respect to using public engagement and KPIs, and annual reporting tied to the budget process.

A question was raised with respect to how much the public typically engages on the Plan, and whether their priorities generally align with Council's priorities. S. Austin advised that public engagement was significant for the current Plan and that priorities were mostly in line with those of Council when scoped appropriately.

H. Kerr asked members to think about whether there is anything in particular they think the public should be asked in the public engagement survey and advised that suggestions could be sent to S. Austin. A question was raised with respect to the types of surveys that will be used and whether the surveys will provide education to the respondents as well as soliciting engagement.

H. Kerr outlined next steps including public consultations and community surveys; exploration of alternative futures; drafting strategic directions based on all feedback; and reporting back to Council.

## **5. Adjournment**

Moved by Councillor Cook, Seconded by Councillor Wotten,  
(2) That the meeting be adjourned.

CARRIED

The meeting adjourned at 2:58 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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John Henry, Regional Chair & CEO

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Alexander Harras, Regional Clerk