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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Community Growth and Economic Development
Report: #2025-INFO-92
Date: December 5, 2025

Subject:

2025 Durham Fall Climate Forum and Durham Environmental Achievement Awards

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the 2025 Durham Fall Climate Forum held on November 15, 2025, hosted by the Durham Climate Roundtable (DCR), which included the Durham Environmental Achievement Awards, hosted by the Durham Environment and Climate Advisory Committee (DECAC).

2. Background

2.1 In December 2022, Regional Council endorsed staff recommendations to transition the Durham Region Roundtable on Climate Change (DRRCC) from an advisory committee of Regional Council to an independent multi-stakeholder organization hosted by Ontario Tech University. As part of this shift the DRRCC's name was changed to the Durham Climate Roundtable (DCR). The DCR was charged with supporting multi-stakeholder collaboration to drive the implementation of climate action strategies across the region.

- 2.2 Part of DCR's mandate is to build awareness and accountability for climate action through an annual report that tracks progress towards greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets, and a community climate forum to share results and exchange ideas and best practices to accelerate and celebrate success.
- 2.3 DECAC is a citizen advisory committee of Regional Council that provides advice to Regional Council and staff on environmental and climate change matters.
- 2.4 The Durham Environmental Achievement Awards have been presented by DECAC since 2003. In the past, the Awards were presented in an annual, stand-alone ceremony. In 2023, a partnership between DECAC and the DCR and Ontario Tech University was formed, and the Awards were changed to become a biennial program, presented at the Durham Fall Climate Forum.
- 2.5 The 2024 Forum was held at Regional Headquarters and focused on regional progress and initiatives for sustainable development, challenges and opportunities ahead, and the potential and real economic impacts of climate change.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 In December 2022, Council endorsed staff recommendations to transition the Durham Region Roundtable on Climate Change to an independent multi-stakeholder entity based within Ontario Tech University through [Report #2022-COW-28](#), the Durham Climate Roundtable (DCR).
- 3.2 In December 2023, a summary of the inaugural Durham Fall Climate Forum, which included presentation of the DECAC Awards, was presented through [Report #2023-INFO-105](#).
- 3.3 In January 2025, Regional Council considered DECAC's 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Workplan and Terms of Reference through [Report #2025-CG-2](#).

4. Overview of Durham Fall Climate Forum

- 4.1 The third annual Durham Fall Climate Forum took place on November 15, 2025, at Durham Region Headquarters, in collaboration with the [Brilliant Energy Institute](#) (BEI) at Ontario Tech University. This year's event achieved the highest turnout to date, bringing together approximately 240 participants for a full day of inclusive dialogue, interactive activities, and networking aimed at advancing a resilient and climate-conscious future.

4.2 A key highlight of the day was a keynote presentation from Ontario Tech University professor [Dr Tanner Mirlees](#) on the topic of climate misinformation, followed by a panel discussion featuring leaders from academia, government, and civil society. The discussion explored strategies for communicating climate change in ways that are accessible, empowering, and rooted in community, while sharing ideas on collaborative approaches to address climate challenges across the region.

4.3 The forum also offered electric vehicle test drives provided by [Plug N' Drive](#), and featured exhibitor booths showcasing the work of local sustainability organizations, community partners, and student led projects. These exhibits informed attendees about ongoing initiatives and opportunities to engage in climate action within the community.

5. Overview of the 2025 Durham Environmental Achievement Awards

5.1 The Durham Fall Climate Forum also featured the 2025 Durham Environmental Achievement Awards, hosted by DECAC.

5.2 Six nominations were received from a variety of organizations and individuals across the region this year. Five were deemed complete and eligible. The award recipients represented extraordinary efforts of citizens and organizations to preserve, protect and enhance the region's environment.

5.3 Nominations were reviewed by the DECAC Awards Subcommittee. DECAC considered recommendations from the Awards Subcommittee and endorsed Award recipients at its October 16, 2025 meeting.

5.4 The Durham Environment Achievement Awards program has eight categories, each named in honour of past environmental leaders. This year, awards were presented in five of the eight categories, as follows:

- a. **Irene Kock Environmental Awareness Award** was presented to Isabel Savransky for fostering effective communication, sharing knowledge, and exhibiting leadership in helping others learn about the environment and climate change. During her time as an Asset and Sustainability Planner with Ontario Tech University, Isabel organized various events and programs that brought together students, staff and the broader community to learn about the environment and climate change, including a repair café and free store, sustainability tours, and the "Great Sustainability Debate" event.

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- b. **Jessica Markland Partnership Award** was presented to The Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture for co-operative efforts to enhance the environment and promote sustainability by building partnerships with public and community interests. The Barrett Centre operates two urban farms in Ajax and Whitby that include market gardens, vertical indoor farms, and education programming for kindergarten to college students and community groups. Over 100 community partners make these programs possible.
 - c. **Dr. J. Murray Speirs Restoration Award** was presented to General Motors Canada – Oshawa Assembly Plant for their efforts to restore the natural environment and support climate adaptation. The Oshawa Assembly Plant planted 10,000 trees on unused land near their facility, established no-mow zones and on-site beehives and pollinator gardens, and a zero-waste program. They hosted invasive species removal event and have instituted a Sustainability Ambassador Program.
 - d. **John G. Goodwin Sustainable Group Award** was presented to Laura Holmes and the Environmental Club of St. Bernard Catholic Elementary School (Whitby) for going above and beyond to make a positive impact on the environment through both education and stewardship. The group applied for funding from Trees Canada to plant 65 trees and over 100 flowers and wild grasses throughout their school yard. A group of 70 students, their family members, and staff came together to plant the trees and flowers, and the students are involved in long-term maintenance and upkeep of the plantings.
 - e. **George A. Scott Stewardship Award** was presented to Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a non-profit, social, educational, and cultural organization for Hindus living outside of India, for efforts to maintain, protect, and preserve Durham's environment. HSS adopted Harwood Avenue in Ajax and Brock Street in Whitby, organizing multiple road clean up events throughout the year. In that time, HSS has successfully removed over 440 pounds of litter. Future plans include adopting a road in Oshawa and park in Pickering.

5.5 DECAC looks forward to awarding all eight awards categories in future years. The remaining award categories include:

- a. **Eric Krause Innovation Award** for forward-thinking and innovative efforts to encourage positive change through plans, policies, or initiatives related to enhancing the environment and building climate resilience.

- b. **Lois James Leadership Award** for an elementary or secondary school student who has contributed to protecting Durham's environment.
- c. **Evylin Stroud Lifetime Achievement Award** for individuals who continually dedicate themselves to protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

5.6 DECAC would like to thank Regional Councillors Shahid, Pettingill, and Marimpietri for attending the Awards ceremony and presenting each recipient with a plaque to recognize their efforts.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with the following Strategic Directions and Pathways in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

- a. Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action
 - E5. Respect the natural environment, including greenspaces, waterways, and agricultural lands.
- b. Strong Relationships
 - S1. Enhance inclusive opportunities for community engagement and meaningful collaboration.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The Durham Fall Climate Forum was hosted at Regional Headquarters on November 15, 2025. This year's event saw record participation, with approximately 240 attendees engaging in dialogue and activities to advance a resilient, climate-conscious future. This was the third annual Durham Climate Forum, and staff expect that the Region will again host the Durham Climate Forum in November 2026.

7.2 The 2025 Environmental Achievement Awards, presented by DECAC, were part of the Forum's proceedings. DECAC would like to extend congratulations to all 2025 Awards recipients and looks forward to presenting the next Environmental Achievement Awards in 2027.

7.3 For additional information about the Climate Forum, contact: Nayel Halim, Policy Advisor, at Nayel.Halim@durham.ca and for the DECAC Awards, contact: Amanda Bathe, Senior Planner, at Amanda.Bathe@durham.ca.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Commissioner of Community Growth and
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