

Report

Date	November 20, 2024	File:
Subject	Environmental Advisory Committee October 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes and Recommendations report dated November 20, 2024 for information.	

PURPOSE

To provide the Environmental Advisory Committee minutes for receipt and the associated recommendations for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) met on October 22, 2024. The draft minutes are attached to this report (Attachment 1) and staff are providing additional input for Council's consideration of the EAC's requests.

The 2022 [Climate Action and Energy Plan](#) (CAEP) outlines actions to promote solar photovoltaic (PV) systems. Staff previously recommended to Council on [December 7, 2021](#), that the solar market be monitored for financial and technological improvement. In response, public delegations were made to the EAC on [April 26, 2022](#), and Council on [April 19, 2023](#), leading Council to direct the EAC to review North Cowichan's approach to solar in the CAEP with the following motion to:

- (1) investigate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of installations on civic buildings and typical single-family buildings, mindful of the recommendations brought forward at the August 22, 2023, Environmental Advisory Committee meeting about solar power,
- (2) look for opportunities to educate and demonstrate to residents to advance solar power,
- (3) investigate municipal tools and incentives available to advance solar projects in North Cowichan; and
- (4) bring back a report to the Environmental Advisory Committee for review.

The EAC considered the response to this motion during their October 22, 2024, meeting and recommended an eight-part motion for Council's consideration, discussed below.

DISCUSSION

A staff report and appended technical report were provided to the EAC during the October 22, 2024, meeting (Attachment 2). The EAC discussed performance reporting and awareness of municipal solar systems, building staff capacity in solar, concern that the provincial emissions factor for BC Hydro electricity is not fully representative of electrical emissions, the impact that solar would have on CAEP implementation, and North Cowichan's (lack of) electrical utility status. The EAC adopted an eight-part motion for Council's consideration explained below:

- (1) *Authorize up to \$50K from the CAEP Reserve in the 2025 budget to install solar panels on the Crofton Firehall to provide a demonstration site for solar.*

Four municipal buildings were assessed based on current solar installation pricing and BC Hydro incentives: Municipal Hall, Cowichan Aquatic Centre, Fuller Lake Arena, and the Crofton Firehall.

The Crofton Firehall was recommended due to the recent expansion project that included making the building solar-ready. This project site offered less complexity and a lower capital cost than the other sites. Staff would report on the array as part of awareness activities (recommendations 6 and 8). The term demonstration is used to describe municipal experience, not technological maturity. Solar PV has been installed in the Cowichan Valley for more than a decade but is a new technology for North Cowichan staff. A solar PV array would offer staff learning opportunities and provide an opportunity for North Cowichan to report on system performance through its website and annual reports.

Other assessed locations would offer increased profiles, given their location proximate to major transportation corridors, and could offer improved awareness opportunities more significant than those recommended in this motion. Project costs would need to be reviewed to confirm additional expenses for structural upgrades or electrical work and/or if additional educational opportunities are desired (e.g. sign displays, real-time monitoring systems).

(2) Monitor the performance of the RCMP building's solar installation as a demonstration site for solar.

A solar array has been installed on the roof of the RCMP building. This system is going through the commissioning process and is North Cowichan's first solar PV installation. Performance data and system information can be highlighted on the website and in annual reporting (recommendations 6 and 8).

(3) Monitor BC Hydro's emerging rate structure to reassess viability, with potential changes including virtual net metering, larger capacity installations, and pricing structures.

BC Hydro's rate application to the BC Utilities Commission in December 2024¹ may offer more significant opportunities for solar PV, including virtual net metering and larger capacity installations. It could change the financial business case with a new net-metering rate structure. Outcomes from this rate process would be incorporated into awareness activities (recommendation 6) or could result in a different financial outlook for installations.

(4) Explore opportunities to increase awareness of requirements and streamline the permit process with the building design, construction, and solar-installer community.

With permitting required for the installation of solar panels, there's an opportunity to improve awareness of this requirement with the building community and consider if there are opportunities to streamline processes. This could be explored through improved website content (recommendation 6) or additional engagement opportunities.

¹ <https://www.bcuc.com/OurWork/ViewProceeding?applicationid=1249>

- (5) *Assess property-assessed clean energy programs to understand potential, administration, and taxation implications.*

The assessment of property-assessed clean energy (PACE) programs was an action included in the CAEP, and the recommendation would be for staff to undertake an assessment to understand the administration and taxation implications of this action. Solar could be an option to include as part of this assessment. Council could also consider tax breaks or reductions in permit fees for buildings installing solar or ask staff to look at offering municipal incentives or low-interest loans. Municipal tools should be considered for implementation greater than solar and include other energy efficiency and emission reduction potential for CAEP implementation.

- (6) *Improve North Cowichan website content to increase awareness of solar projects and available incentives.*

North Cowichan's website does not have materials that provide awareness on solar energy. This website content can highlight the implementation of the other recommendations.

Additional awareness activities could be pursued with funding and Council direction, such as workshops, promotional materials, and signage installations. The solar industry could also offer additional promotions and participate in awareness.

- (7) *Explore introducing a GIS layer that provides information on solar potential.*

North Cowichan's existing web-based mapping services could have a new layer that assesses buildings (e.g. roof and orientation) for solar potential. This would make use of North Cowichan's existing data systems.

- (8) *Staff to report back annually on the implementation of the above recommendations.*

Staff currently prepare an annual report on CAEP Reserve Fund expenditures for the EAC, per the Terms of Reference for the Reserve Fund. Reporting back on the implementation of these actions would be included in the annual summaries.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** That Council direct staff to:
 - (1) Authorize up to \$50K from the Climate Action and Energy Plan Reserve Fund in the 2025 budget to install solar panels on the Crofton Firehall to provide a demonstration site for solar.
 - (2) Monitor the performance of the RCMP building's solar installation as a demonstration site for solar.
 - (3) Monitor BC Hydro's emerging rate structure to reassess viability, with potential changes including virtual net metering, larger capacity installations, and pricing structures.
 - (4) Explore opportunities to increase awareness of requirements and streamline the permit process with the building design, construction, and solar-installer community.
 - (5) Assess property-assessed clean energy programs to understand potential, administration and taxation implications.

- (6) Improve North Cowichan’s website content to increase awareness of solar projects and available incentives.
- (7) Explore introducing a GIS layer that provides information on solar potential.
- (8) Report back annually to the Environmental Advisory Committee on the implementation of the above recommendations.
 - This recommended option was recommended by the EAC to Council. These recommendations would increase solar installations and awareness activities with existing staff resources.

2. That Council direct staff to:

- (1) Amend the recommendation on solar energy by *[Council to identify]*

3. That Council receive the Climate Change Specialist’s Environmental Advisory Committee October 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes and Recommendations report dated November 20, 2024 for information.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDED OPTION

Implications	Concerns or Impacts to North Cowichan
Social	• No significant impacts or concerns.
Environmental	• No significant impacts or concerns.
Financial	• The recommendation would allocate up to \$50,000 from the Climate Action and Energy Plan Reserve Fund for a solar installation on the Crofton Firehall. After a 10-year capital payback period, solar energy would result in \$2,722 annual savings ² .
Policy/Legislation	• No significant impacts or concerns.
Strategic Priority	• Aligns with Council’s Strategy Plan direction to implement the Climate Action and Energy Plan.
Communication	• No significant impacts or concerns. Provides a leadership opportunity to increase awareness of the benefits of solar power generation.
Staffing Implications	• No significant impacts or concerns. Staffing hours are necessary to oversee the implementation of recommended actions, but efforts are not expected to be substantial.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to:

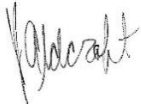
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- (2) Monitor the performance of the RCMP building’s solar installation as a demonstration site for solar.
- (3) Monitor BC Hydro's emerging rate structure to reassess viability, with potential changes including virtual net metering, larger capacity installations, and pricing structures.
- (4) Explore opportunities to increase awareness of requirements and streamline the permit process with the building design, construction, and solar-installer community.
- (5) Assess property-assessed clean energy programs to understand potential, administration and

² Based on 2024 BC Hydro rates.

taxation implications.

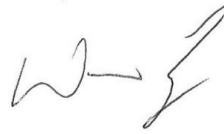
- (6) Improve North Cowichan's website content to increase awareness of solar projects and available incentives.
- (7) Explore introducing a GIS layer that provides information on solar potential.
- (8) Report back annually to the Environmental Advisory Committee on the implementation of the above recommendations.

Report prepared by:



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Report reviewed by:



David Conway
Director, Subdivision and Environmental Services

Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Bill Corsan
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Attachments:

- (1) October 22, 2024, Environmental Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
- (2) October 22, 2024, RTEAC Solar