

Big G in conversation: What's the plan April 20, 2021

Transcripts

Host: Wendy King

John Regan, General Manager, Economic Development and Tourism

Krista Walkey, General Manager, Planning and Building Services

Terry Gayman, General Manager/City engineer, Engineering and Transportation Services

Danna Evans, General Manager, Culture and Recreation

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Upbeat music

Wendy King

Welcome to BG, in conversations podcaster inside Guelph City Hall.

Wendy King

Hi, I'm Wendy King. On today's show we're talking with the folks from engineering and transportation services, planning and building services, economic development, and tourism and Culture and recreation about what the plan is for, shaping Guelph to be future ready, let's get started.

Wendy King

We are asking the questions. What's the plan on our podcast today and our topic is shaping Guelph. Joining me is Krista Walkey. The general Manager of Planning and Building Services, Terry Gayman and general Manager, City engineer, Engineering and transportation services. John Regan, general Manager of Economic and Development and Tourism, and Danna Evans, GM of Culture and recreation. So welcome everybody.

Terry Gayman

Thanks for having us.

Wendy King

Krista, I guess. Start us off. So shaping Guelph. That's a big topic, but in what ways are we talking?

Krista Walkey

So Shaping Guelph is one of our large policy projects that we're undertaking with our community to provide input to help us decide how we grow and how we grow to the next 30 for through the next 30 years. So what does the City of Guelph look like in 2051? Do we have enough housing available? Do we have enough employment lands available? So that's our master planning exercise that we're undertaking right now? Really looking at our long term scenario out to 2051.

Wendy King

That interested me that you're doing it so far in advance? I don't know if that's normal or Guelph is kind of looking further than usual, but so 2051 is your target year that you're looking at.

Krista Walkey

Yeah, so the province sets our target through the growth plan so they have mandated that we do plan to 2051, so right now we are undertaking a comprehensive exercise with a bunch of other departments, including you know your health hear from Terry and John in a moment. But how do we accommodate an extra 60,000 people in the city as well for 30 years an extra 34,000 jobs? So that's the exercise we have on the goal right now.

Wendy King

So why now?

Krista Walkey

Well, the province told us that we have to have this done by 2022, so that's kind of the why, why we're getting it done right now and also helps us look ahead and plan our capital infrastructure and budgets appropriately. Two if we're on the same page working to 2051.

Wendy King

For sure. So everything always seems to kind of go back to your official plan, so how would you say this impacts the average resident?

Krista Walkey

You know, this is where you know I'm probably going to get a little bit planning geeky on the on the on the call right now, but it does really excite me. And what the city is going to look like in 2051. So we'll lay out our master plan that is our strategic vision for the with the city is going to look like in 2051 and it recognized the quality of life that Guelph currently has and what we want to have in the future. It talks about our ecosystem, our community facilities, the availability of infrastructure, the vibrancy of our neighborhoods, and the character in the health of the downtown, so it sets out the land use designations that you may happen to reside on or work in an what's around you so you can kind of always take a look at it and see what's coming in the future. If it's not already there. And it it really gives us an idea of how Guelph is going to look for that in the future to 30 years down the road.

Wendy King

And do you get the average citizen involved in this in any way? Or did that come later?

Krista Walkey

So far we know we started this a little while ago and and some of our engagement is, you know, up to about 1000 people per engagement activity and right now on have your say Guelph. We do have another opportunity to engage on what is our preferred community structure looking like so throughout the rest of 2021 in the early part of 2022 we will be engaging the community a lot. And and really, do ask for input into what the city looks like and feels like going forward.

Wendy King

Yeah, that's great. So how do you take into account cultural heritage designation and how does that all work together?

Krista Walkey

You know, heritage for this city of Guelph is really important to the look and feel of our community. City was founded in 1827, so it's been around for quite awhile and the buildings in the downtown Guelph and the older areas of Guelph are the local quarried limestone, which really all contribute to how Guelph looks in the legacy of the city itself. Earlier this year we brought forward a report called the Cultural Heritage Action Plan, identifies various areas of the city in our Cultural Heritage resource inventory. That we as staff use going forward, and it's really a plan that prioritizes actions to conserve, conserve the cultural heritage of the city. And it also sets out some further work which we're going to do is to come up with some incentives to make sure we do conserve those natural assets so the cultural heritage and heritage structures in the city do play a significant part of how we plan the city.

Wendy King

And I guess Terri bringing you in here. What would be the plan for building.

Terry Gayman

Thanks Wendy. So maybe I get to go a little engineering and transportation geeky here to pick up on what Krista is saying. But I mean, as you can imagine, there are so many initiatives and projects going on. To build our city and it all starts with our strategic plan directions, particularly around building our future and navigating our future. So these directions ensure city staff are completing projects that help with things like maintaining existing infrastructure like our roads and our pipes in our downtown or throughout the city. In developing or securing new assets like our recreation facilities and also gives us direction to complete projects that improve connectivity to our transportation network. And we do this through projects like our Transportation Master plan which calls on us to build a city in a connected way that allows for more sustainability in the way we travel, so we prioritize all this work through a number of studies including master plans and secondary plans and things Krista mentioned as well as our corporate asset management plan. And we use those plans to prepare capital budget for City Council approval. And once approved, city budget gives city staff the final go ahead for those construction projects that people see that build and rebuild our city.

Wendy King

Right. So you mentioned the transportation network and I know you guys are. We did a whole podcast on on that kind of plan and it's amazing when you guys are planning. But what do you envision there from now till I guess 2051.

Terry Gayman

Yeah, so like I said the navigating our future strategic direction tells us improvements to the transportation network arm. For a thriving city, so the Transportation Master plan is that high level plan that sets direction for building our transportation network well into the future out to 2051 like Krista mentioned.

And when the transportation network work is strong, it has so many positive impacts on the city. So no matter what mode you choose like walking, cycling, transit or car, everything from recreation to goods movement to commuting to work is so closely tied to the directions and policies that get set in

that transportation master plan. So right now, city staff are developing that plan to speak to Council later this year and it's centered around a bunch of core values that are important to Guelph, like road safety, equity, sustainability, completeness, affordability, and then again tying it and being supportive of land use planning. So back to the work that Krista mentioned and all of those elements combined together important in balancing the needs of a growing city like Guelph while ensuring we're making choices that benefit everyone, especially in including the future generations.

Wendy King

Great, and every city the downtown is so vital. Hear that all the time. What downtown improvements or or on the map?

Terry Gayman

So through a lot of the work that's been done over the past few years, the city is really established. A real vision for a vibrant and thriving urban downtown in the future. And one key part of achieving that vision is ensuring the essential services like water and wastewater can be delivered reliably so that businesses can thrive and people can get the services that they count on and we've seen that especially prevalent during the global pandemic. In downtown, the majority of the pipes are very old, so we know we need a plan to improve them. And right now we're at the very early stages of developing a bit of a program approach to renewing the road and pipe infrastructure in downtown and so through our asset management work that I mentioned earlier, we're developing plans and priorities on where the investments should be made, and we're also getting set to begin work with our various community partners on how this work can be completed while minimizing the inconveniences and disruptions that come with construction in city streets.

Wendy King

Right, for sure. Now John, Economic Development and tourism. You have really taken a hit with this pandemic. I mean no doubt what are you doing to assist the devastated tourism sector.

John Regan

Thanks Wendy. Yeah, absolutely the tourism industry was by far the the first sector impacted in is likely going to be well will actually be the last sector to recover. Devastated, as is probably not even the right word, it it. It is quite significant, however, what the city has done recently is we've just launched a tourism recovery grant and that is \$350,000 that tourism providers tourism businesses can apply up to \$10,000 for some recovery money and that could be put towards PPE. It could be towards re pivoting, could be towards just making the bank account look at flushing, offsetting some of those operating costs.

Wendy King

Well, pivot, there's there's a word we've all heard the last year and a half, right?

John Regan

I know, yeah, I need to come up with a different word.

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Leanne Warren

And Krista, are you? You're involved with that funding so that I notice you're very excited about that.

Krista Walkey

So I think John Shop kind of leads leads that component, but planning is certainly part of what happens in the downtown and how we do move forward as well.

Wendy King

For sure. So John OK tourism, not the only victim obviously but how do you work in your Department to assist retail and services and manufacturing?

John Regan

Yeah, so certainly tourism was not the only affected sector throughout this pandemic. And so we have a program that was kind of in hibernation. The bid it was called grow Guelph and it's call it a BR&E program. Are any program or business retention and expansion program. And this quite often involved site visits where we go and meet with the business operators, the owners and we look for red flag issues or green flag issues is what we call them and so working with businesses to find out you know, how can we as a city work with them for them to be more, for them to be sustainable and how we can help them survive, so all things that you've heard from Krista and Terri tie directly into every everything the city does economic development. So to be geeky on the economic development side, we're all on the economic development business whether we like it or not. So we're relaunching that, grow Guelph and the business retention expansion program where we can actually get boots on the ground. Probably virtually for the next little while, and understanding what the needs are and how we can really assist businesses. the other. The other piece I wanted to mention to the Tourism Recovery Fund, you know, is a great vision of council and it's not the only sectors that have been hit and also, Danna Evans, who's who's on the call. She's also launched emergency fund as well to help the not for profits because it's it's not just. Those for profit businesses and affected everyone has been affected by this

Wendy King

Danna, did you want to jump in there about the emergency fund for not for profits?

Danna Evans

Absolutely, after the first. The first stage of funding is open right now for not for profit organizations for individuals, for our sort of unincorporated groups or from 5000 to 25,000, where there are organizations can apply for funding to look for individuals, look for funding to help in that COVID pivot. So what is that? What is that? A new thing that we need a leg up for to try to help in order to have some impact and well being in the community?

Wendy King

Right. How marketable would you say Guelph is?

John Regan

Oh my goodness. I think it's very marketable. Guelph has an incredible reputation and it is a desired destination. Absolutely, we've we still get many investment enquiries. We've had businesses expand. We've had businesses open, so even though it's not, it's not all doom and gloom necessarily. You know Pandemic had had a huge negative impact on the majority of businesses, some businesses have been able to adapt, not using the word pivot, but some businesses who were able to or or could augment their businesses have done have done well and will continue to do well, but Guelph is remains very viable as the investment of choice as far as locations go, not only in in in Ontario, but in Canada.

Wendy King

So just not leave that topic quite yet. We're still in the middle of a pandemic. You know we're getting more and more restrictions put on us. We don't quite know yet what post Pandemic life is going to look like, so when you look at the future that way, how are you going to get out of the mess? I know that's a giant question, but I'm sure you think about it all the time.

John Regan

Oh absolutely, it keeps me literally keeps me up at night as a as I sure it does everyone else. How long is it gonna take for us to get out of the message that the the question back is? How long did it take us to get into this mess? And I think we need to have at a factor to that as well. Really again, Guelph lights are very resilient and I think that we will recover very well because of that because of our positive attitude or positive outlook. The the leadership at the city. Is impeccable hit is is it's very driven, it's very motivated and our step on the economic development side is that we are in the process. We were in the process of developing our strategic plan and so making sure that that has, uh, get some legs on it later on this year as we launch it. I think that's really going to be a driving force and how we're going to get out of this post pandemic. But again, it's it's it's not just economic development, it's it's Chris, his group, Terri's Group, and the entire city. You know, work so well together in in In delivering that that outcome of of recovery.

Wendy King

Ya, right. Dana I guess your bailiwick is kind of affordable housing. What where does the city? How do you provide that?

Danna Evans

The city has affordable housing strategy that aligns to the official plan and so in partnership, certainly with planning in any growth strategies. We've looked at the affordable housing strategy is sort of our base. We work very closely on this sort of social services side on the emergency cell, turn on the homeless programs with the County of Wellington. They've been elected our provincial, consolidated Service manager, so how the city then gets involved is certainly from a more is that policy work from targets. And we have Luckily have a little bit of funding, so there's an incentive program and a municipal incentive program. And then there's a little bit of a gap about how to get access from the program and the strategy and then into the funds. So stay tuned. There's a report information going through the Council shortly related this year as well. That should hopefully open up that to give a little bit more open and transparency to the community on how we can help leverage an as we leverage as a municipality. Then organizations and proponents can leverage knew housing stock, whether it's affordable or even supportive housing through other levels of government, knowing that they have that local support, and sometimes that truly is just through funding goes along way into helping increasing the housing stock in Guelph.

Wendy King

Is what the city does different from what the County does for affordable housing or do you just work together?

Danna Evans

We certainly work very closely together, but it's sort of pin hold in. Looking at the housing continuum at different levels of support. So the city sort of picks up on the latter half of the housing continuum into affordable housing into home ownership, and then the County works on the sort of other side which is

around supports rent to geared income, emergency shelter, transitional housing and the city pays them for that service. So it's a sort of \$16 million investment into housing for the community annually.

Wendy King

It's really hard because you guys are all in your different departments, is kind of like you have to have a crystal ball. I mean, I'm sure you know all your figures and you have ways of figuring it out, but really, I mean, who knows, right? We didn't know this was coming either.

Danna Evans

Now I'm I haven't got my crystal ball geek hat on, maybe I'll stay on the culture work for my geek at just the same, but I would love that crystal ball, but we're not there yet.

Wendy King

Yeah, exactly well. We've come to the point that everyone loves our rapid fire questions, and I think probably well, whoever wants to jump in, but it might be Terry. What impacts do all of these initiatives we talked about have on the city budget?

Terry Gayman

Well, as you can imagine, there's there's only so much money to go around, Wendy. So we really have to spend time doing our best work on prioritizing, so we use data, right? We use policy and we try our very best to understand where is the biggest bang for your buck and what's going to have the best impact for our community. And those are the projects that we try to bring forward and have our City Council make their decisions in terms of the money we spend and where it goes.

Wendy King

Krista, did you want to jump in?

Krista Walkey

Yeah, I just want to add that too, since we're planning in in, you know, out 30 years. It really helps inform that capital budget as well. And you know, planning works with economic development, Danna's group and cultural tourism and Terry, but we really help inform that capital budget by the works were doing now is well.

Wendy King

How did these initiatives benefit the community?

Krista Walkey

Maybe start off again, we're just we're providing that long term outlook and thoughtful, comprehensive planning that will attract new residents, businesses and services that add to our community.

Wendy King

Right and one word if you could to describe why the city wants to move forward with each of these,

Krista Walkey

My word will be comprehensive.

Wendy King

Anybody else?

John regan

I would go with responsible.

Terry Gayman

I'd go with sustainable.

Danna Evans

I'm going to go with home.

Wendy King

Great, great words. Well listen, you're all expert geeks. I will, I will give you all that. It's it's a pleasure to have talks you all and you know your stuff and Guelph is in good hands. It's an aggressive course of action so Guelph is going to be future ready. So my thanks to Krista, Danna, John and Terry for your time and expertise today.

Upbeat music

Wendy King

I'm Wendy King with the city of Guelph's Big G in Conversation podcast. Thanks for joining me. If you have ideas for a show or comments you could email bgpodcast@guelph.ca. Until next time, take care and let's keep the conversation going.

Upbeat music

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