
Megan Mitton

Town Councillor
Sackville, NB
m.mitton@sackville.com

Climate Change - Opening Doors: A Municipal Perspective*

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OVERVIEW

ENGOS have the opportunity to help municipal councils take a leadership role and respond to climate change. Municipalities are on the front lines of this issue, but we have limited resources to address it, and rely on federal and provincial funding and policy for support. Partnerships in the community and with ENGOS are essential to making progress.

Simplified Explanation of Municipal Structure and Setting Our Agenda

Mayors are leaders; they chair meetings and may only vote to break a tie. Councillors vote to decide on policy. Staff bring recommendations, then put policy decisions into action. CAO is liaison between Council and Staff and leads Staff. Municipalities are responsible for the day-to-day operations of services and infrastructure, so these urgent/routine things often drive the agenda. Strategic plans and annual priorities, as well as issues brought forward from community members, influence the direction. These are opportunities to shape our agenda.

Town of Sackville Organization Chart (municipalities will vary in size and complexity):

https://sackville.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Sackville_OrgChart.pdf

KEY POINTS

1. Engage early. Engage often.
 - a. Communicate with Mayor & Councillors and with municipal staff
 - i. Being a Mayor or Councillors is often a part-time position
 - ii. Staff may be part-time and/or overworked
 1. Engage with both; staff will have the institutional memory so the relationship will be there even when new Councillors are elected
 - b. Help educate us and keep us accountable (which helps us do our job)
 - i. Invite Council to your events. Attend and/or present at Council meetings
 - ii. Ask for status updates on goals we have publicly stated
 - c. Help drive the agenda by bringing forward issues and ideas

*These are my personal thoughts, based on my experience. They are not official statements from the Town of Sackville.

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2. Bring solutions (not just problems) and funding (when possible)
 - a. Consult and collaborate
 - i. ENGOs have access to funding that municipalities may not
 - ii. Municipalities have limited resources but may be willing to collaborate, either by being a partner or at least voicing support
 3. Align with strategic plan and annual priorities
 - a. Help shape these plans and priorities when possible (engage early!)
 - b. Make it clear how these issues are relevant to the municipality, to the constituents, and to the wellbeing of the community (short- and long-term)
 - i. Not just about environmental sustainability; address economic and social!
 4. Symbolic things (motions, events, etc.) might seem small but they help educate, raise public awareness, and change direction. They can set a precedent and build momentum.
 5. Things will move slowly. Use this time to build relationships.
 - a. Be respectful and find common ground
 - b. Councillors and Staff are people who care about your community
 - c. Answer these Qs:
 - i. Why should my issue matter to them?
 - ii. What is the best way to work with them?

Collaboration: Do It (If You're Not Already)

There is work that municipalities may not be able to do alone (not enough resources) even when they are on board with the idea. ENGOs may be able to access funding that municipalities can't/don't apply for; get the funding, then partner or get support from them. For example, EOS Eco-Energy applied for funding from the Green Investment Fund (Mount Allison Student Union) for an Electric Vehicle Charging Station, then partnered with the Town of Sackville and had it installed at the Town's Visitor Information Centre. Town of Sackville also worked with EOS on a Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan and on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Partners for Climate Protection Milestones. These projects have sped up progress in Sackville!

Note: Be aware of actual/perceived conflicts of interest for Councillors if they work with or on the Board of an ENGO. If there is a vote on something relating to your ENGO, it might come up.

SUMMARY

Engage early and often with Council and Staff. Bring forward ideas/solutions (and funding when possible). Consult, update, and collaborate. Try to shape and align with municipal strategic plans and priorities. Help set the agenda by communicating your ideas, then follow up and keep us accountable to help us do the right thing. Things will move slow so take this time to build respectful working relationships.