



BOARD REPORT

REPORT No.: 2025-11

MEETING DATE: MARCH 20, 2025

SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with information on initiatives undertaken in 2024 to enhance environmental stewardship across the organization, in keeping with the objective of being an environmentally friendly organization.

BACKGROUND

At the January 23, 2014 meeting, the Board requested that a report outlining the various green energy initiatives undertaken by Administration and potential energy savings be presented annually, which has been provided since that date.

Since that time, and with a view to expanding the scope of environmental stewardship to all areas of the organization, TBDSSAB has continued to view various operational items through that environmental stewardship lens.

COMMENTS

Current and On-going Initiatives

Housing Portfolio Energy Management

Significant energy-related projects have been implemented through the annual TBDSSAB approved Capital Budgets, as well as through 100% funded initiatives over the years.

In addition, energy-efficient products replaced high-energy-usage products to reduce consumption. Several of these projects were supported through energy savings incentive

programs provided by Synergy North, Hydro One, Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO), and Enbridge.

Through the Capital Budget, projects that are anticipated to have a positive environmental stewardship impact are identified as Green projects. Attachment #1 outlines the list of completed capital projects with a specific positive environmental impact.

The most significant projects in 2024 included:

1. The replacement of domestic hot water tanks to improve energy efficiency at Wardrope Court, Elizabeth Court, and Cumberland Court;
2. The installation of new LED lighting throughout the common areas at Badanai Court to improve energy efficiency; and
3. The supply and installation of new fridges. This will reduce the energy used by the previous appliances.

In early 2024, Administration engaged with Enbridge and the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) through their Home Winterproofing (HWP) and Save on Energy Affordability Program (EAP). The program provided no cost, (to TBDSSAB) energy efficiency measures for the direct-owned housing portfolio, specifically, attic insulation, draft proofing, and appliance replacement. The program included an initial audit of each unit, and a determination of the available upgrades that would be eligible. At year end, the program was still in progress with various units having received replacement fridges, and attic insulation and / or weatherstripping installed.

From the installation of more energy-efficient products through these initiatives, additional cost avoidance of operating costs are expected over the useful life span due to lower consumption, maintenance, and repair costs.

Paper Reduction Initiative

Significant efforts have been undertaken over the past five years across the organization to reduce the amount of paper produced, printed, and distributed.

The following processes continued in 2024 which continues to support this initiative:

- Continued digitizing applications for Housing Security Funds;
- Continued marketing of the Ontario Works (OW) My Benefit application for two-way communication between the client and the caseworker by establishing plans to reduce the required paper intake for these programs;
- Continued Instructions to OW clients to scan and email documents;
- Continued focus on paperless processes for those OW clients who are active in My Benefits; increasing from 1,091 benefit units at the end of 2023 to 1,305 benefit units at the end of 2024. As a result, they have stopped receiving the following paper documents by mail if their preference is to go paperless:
 - statement of assistance;
 - reporting forms;
 - cheque inserts;

- Continued electronic formats for human resources recruitment files;
- Continued web-based and e-recruiting formats;
- Continued paperless processes for childcare files;
- Continued uploading of all childcare fee subsidy documentation in the Child Care Management System (OCCMS); and
- Continued operation of the electronic / on-line format for Community Housing applications.

TBDSSAB paper purchases have been steadily declining since the start of these initiatives approximately five years ago. In 2024, actual paper purchased was reduced by 34,000 pieces to 660,000. The overall spending on paper decreased by \$347 from \$7,313 in 2023 to \$6,966 in 2024 because of this reduction in purchased paper.

Community Gardens

Tenant inclusion efforts continue to be supported by TBDSSAB Tenant Support Workers, through the organic community gardens. These projects continue to help deliver the TBDSSAB goal of being an environmentally friendly organization. Involving tenants in community gardens, and producing some of their own food, instills the value of working with the earth and protecting the environment while supporting food security efforts.

Throughout the housing portfolio, eight large community gardens and many flower gardens have continued to be maintained with the support of tenants and the Housing Operations team. The larger garden sites were equipped with compost bins and rain barrels to support sustainability efforts.

Neighborhood Cleaning and Recycling

Annual tenant community cleaning efforts have continued to take place in many TBDSSAB neighborhoods involving tenants to help beautify and clean their homes and outdoor areas. Families and individuals are engaged in this process, encouraging the involvement of the children to have them understand the importance of 'pitching in' to keep their community green.

Additionally, recycling programs were previously established and continue to be maintained at many of TBDSSAB's apartment-style buildings, accounting for around 70% of the housing portfolio's units, with education and support provided to encourage involvement.

Information Services Equipment Consolidation

In June of 2019, Information Services (IS) began an initiative to consolidate network and server equipment. This involved using hybrid server and storage systems vs. separate devices for each function, improving server processing capacity allowing TBDSSAB to reduce the number of physical servers by two, while maintaining the same functionality and processing power.

Another initiative was the move from Microsoft Exchange on Premise to Microsoft Exchange Online. Prior to this, TBDSSAB email was hosted onsite, using six virtual

servers. Although virtual servers do not use as much power as physical servers, each virtual server takes processing power to run, thus using electricity. By moving TBDSSAB email to Microsoft Online, the number of virtual servers was reduced by five, from seven to two.

The benefit of these projects continues, as energy consumption continues at reduced levels. Cost avoidance is expected to continue based on the reduced number of servers. In Q3 2023, IS upgraded the core networking infrastructure from chassis style network switches to smaller form factor, more robust switches, reducing the power and energy consumption. In addition, the user access network switches were upgraded to more efficient ones.

The positive impact of server room energy usage resulting from these initiatives continued in 2024, with continued lower average monthly energy usage at 5,209 Kw/h vs. 5,683 kW/h prior to the implementation of these initiatives.

Accounts Payable Process Modernization

In 2022, Administration developed and implemented processes to make the accounts payable function virtually paperless. This enhancement continues to save approximately 15,000-20,000 sheets of paper (part of the Paper Reduction Initiative noted above) from being printed each year, and 10 archive boxes from being stored off-site, as well as the time required to maintain the paper-based process.

Purchasing Policy

Since 2014, the Purchasing Policy CS-03:1 has included Environmental Stewardship to allow for the expanded use of durable products, reusable products, and products (including those used in services) that contain the maximum level of post-consumer waste and/or recyclable content.

Specifications provided for various capital projects include language to ensure proper disposal of all removed equipment as per environmental guidelines.

Single Use Plastics

The Federal government announced its plan to reduce single-use plastics and related plastic waste target to zero by 2030 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In that regard, and in accordance with the Regulations, since December 20, 2022, the manufacture and import for sale in Canada of checkout bags, cutlery, foodservice ware, stir sticks and straws (i.e., straight straws), as defined in the Regulations, are prohibited.

Administration had previously established internal practices to reduce the use of single use plastics, including eliminating the purchase of bottled water and plastic dishes and cutlery. Human Resources had moved towards biodegradable items for all staff events where possible. All these practices continued in 2024.

Coffee Pod and Pen Recycling

In 2023, TBDSSAB implemented an in-office recycling program for coffee pods, pens, pencils and markers. Recycling boxes were placed throughout the Headquarters Office Building. Once boxes are filled, they are shipped to a recycling facility and a certificate is issued to confirm proper disposal and record the weight. In 2024, 50.85 lbs of coffee pods were diverted from the landfill, an increase of 40.27 lbs in the first full year of operation.

E-Waste Recycling

In 2022, TBDSSAB implemented an electronic waste collection at its Headquarters Office Building. This waste is collected in bins throughout the office and sent for recycling under the Electronic Products Recycling Association (EPRA) program and in compliance with all laws and regulations and with Responsible Recycling (R2) standards. Reports are provided for each pickup and a certificate of the amount diverted from the landfill is provided and tracked. In 2024, TBDSSAB recycled 1,332 kg or 2,937 lbs. (2023: 252 kg or 556 lbs.) of E-Waste.

Scrap metal Recycling

In 2024, one of the fleet vehicles that had reached end of life was sent to be recycled. As a result, 3,600 lbs. of scrap metal was diverted from the landfill.

Environmental Stewardship Plan

The Province of Ontario's *Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations – A Made in Ontario Environment Plan*, includes various strategies related to reducing waste that goes to landfills, protecting the air, natural spaces and species, addressing climate change, holding polluters accountable, and supporting infrastructure development while ensuring environmental protection.

In 2021, the Administration developed a Cascaded Environmental Plan for TBDSSAB, using the Provincial plan as a framework, and incorporating the concepts as they apply to TBDSSAB. Similar to the Provincial plan, this is a developing project to further align TBDSSAB activities to enhance its environmental stewardship.

Technical Services Officer - Environmental Sustainability

As a result of the Board's approval of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy, and through the Board's approval, in fall 2024, of the 2025 Operating Budget, Administration can move forward with the inclusion of 1.0 FTE position to support the development and implementation of its strategy. The major responsibilities of this role will include providing technical advice and support for environmental sustainability initiatives, developing and implementing tools, templates and guidelines to coordinate efforts of the environmental sustainability program. This position will also research and track environmental sustainability developments and trends, including but not limited to, leading practices, benchmarks, emerging and innovative technology, new regulations, policies, and programs in other jurisdictions to inform continued development of the environmental sustainability strategy.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

The Practical Vision of the 2013-2016 Strategic Plan included Green Environmentally Friendly Housing within the Optimized Housing strategy, which has been further expanded to focus on environmental stewardship across the organization.

In addition, the focus on continuous improvement of our environmental stewardship practices aligns with the 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan relative to Fostering Innovation and Progress.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital Costs – Housing Portfolio

The capital projects included within the Housing Portfolio are included in the Board approved Capital Budget which is financed from the Housing Portfolio Capital Reserve Fund, as well as opportunities through 100% funded capital programs. In 2024, the cost of the completed projects totaled \$118,102 of which \$28,314 was funded through various externally funded capital programs and \$89,788 funded through the Reserve Fund.

Operating Costs

The priority for green, environmentally sustainable practices is to reduce TBDSSAB's environmental footprint, with a secondary impact of cost avoidance on various operating expenses.

For example:

- Capital projects' priority is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of utility usage across the housing portfolio by reducing energy waste and thereby positively impacting utility costs. Utility costs remain one of the largest operating expenses TBDSSAB incurs within its housing portfolio. Natural gas and electricity amounted to \$2,421,400 in 2024 (2023: \$2,397,200), which accounts for approximately 13% of the operating costs of the housing portfolio. Although utility costs are not totally controllable, further analysis of electricity costs and usage confirms the cost avoidance initiatives worked in 2024 (71% of utility costs relate to electricity). From 2023 to 2024, the average unit cost of electricity increased 18%, yet the total cost increased only 3%. Review of the average normal monthly usage confirmed decreased usage from 2023 to 2024.

It is anticipated that the green, environmentally friendly initiatives will continue to support cost avoidance by controlling the rise of utility consumption (by reducing energy waste) as unit commodity costs for utilities continue to rise.

Operating cost impacts are and will be factored into and included in annual operating budgets.


CONCLUSION

It is concluded that TBDSSAB continues to focus on the strategic direction of providing green, environmentally friendly housing.

It is also concluded that other opportunities to engage in initiatives have been taken and will continue to be investigated and further developed relative to environmental stewardship across the organization.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Attachment #1 [2024 Environmental Stewardship Initiatives - List of Completed Capital Projects](#)

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The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
2024 Environmental Stewardship Initiatives - List of Completed Capital Projects

#	Project Name	Description	Actual Project Cost (\$)
1	Wardrope Court	Domestic Hot Water: Replace hot water tank. The other tank was replaced last year as part of the phased upgrades scheduled for this building.	11,932
2	Elizabeth Court	Domestic Hot Water. Installed recirculation pumps to increase flow of hot water to reduce heat loss as the water travels throughout the building.	14,803
3	Badanai Manor	LED lighting: Upgrade common area lighting and parking lot plug-ins. Replacement of lighting to LED lighting to improve energy efficiency.	51,898
4	Spence Court	Energy Efficient Appliances: Replacement of older appliances to energy efficient fridges and stoves at Spence Court.	15,747
5	Cumberland Court	Domestic Hot Water. The new domestic water heating system will achieve improved energy efficiency and reliability.	17,177
6	Limbrick Place	Exterior Doors: Doors were installed to increase the insulated value and reduce heat loss in the units.	6,545
2024 Totals			118,102