

More reporting needed to show progress on Ontario municipal climate and sustainability plans, says study

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While sustainability reporting is a widespread practice in the private sector, new research shows that the same cannot be said for Ontario

municipalities.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo studied 38 municipalities in Ontario, representing more than two-thirds of the population, and discovered that almost all municipalities publish their sustainability and [climate](#) change goals, but under half are formally reporting on their progress.

The study, [Municipal Sustainability and Climate Planning: A Study of 38 Canadian Local Governments' Plans and Reports](#), appears in the journal *Environments*.

Municipalities are a key part of the equation for Canada to achieve its ambitious [climate action](#) targets, but the significant gap between planning and reporting makes it difficult for the public and stakeholders to stay up to date with performance, whether good or bad.

"Citizens can go online and see the financial performance of a municipality," said Leah Feor, Ph.D. candidate in the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development. "But they would have to dig around to see how the operations and policies of the [municipality](#) are contributing to [sustainable development](#) and climate action. It's not always easy to find."

The researchers found that sustainability information is most commonly reported through annual reports, while separate [sustainability](#) reports are scarce and appear to be decreasing over time. The study further showed that provincial regulation does not guarantee that municipalities will publish Energy Conservation and Demand Management plans and reporting documents on their public websites.

"A regulation isn't a silver bullet for ensuring municipalities adopt planning and reporting practices," said Feor. "If we want to see province-

wide adoption, then we will need to see more guidance, capacity building, and potentially funding from the top. Otherwise, it will be driven bottom-up, and some municipalities will excel, and others will lag."

The next phase of this work is in progress under the [Municipal Net-Zero Action Research Partnership \(N-ZAP\) to support Canadian municipalities in monitoring, measuring, and achieving their climate mitigation goals](#). Feor will interview municipalities across Canada identified as leaders in this space to provide insights for municipalities and other levels of government in Canada seeking to standardize practices, strengthen data, and support the achievement of climate commitments.

More information: Leah Feor et al, Municipal Sustainability and Climate Planning: A Study of 38 Canadian Local Governments' Plans and Reports, *Environments* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/environments10120203](#)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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