Executive Summary

Background and Context

Municipalities have the ability to mitigate the impacts of climate change through land use planning, environmental planning policy, and in collaboration with residents through local level planning. The tools available to municipalities make them effective actors in planning for climate change (Guyadeen *et al*, 2019).

The impacts of climatic changes have been felt most directly at the local level. For example, extreme weather events, which may be attributed to climate change (IPCC, 2018) can cause damage to urban infrastructure. This increased responsibility on municipalities to react to climate change has resulted in a global trend to declare official climate emergencies. Beginning in Australia in 2017 (City of Darebin, 2017), municipalities and countries around the world have declared their communities to be in a state of climate emergency. Two Ontario municipalities that have declared a climate emergency are the City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills. This report investigates the impacts of declaring a climate emergency in Ontario using these two municipal case studies

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this report is two-fold. First develop a set of best practices regarding municipal climate change emergency declarations through a comparative study of existing climate emergency declarations in Ontario. Second, this report will investigate the day-to-day impacts of declaring a climate emergency on municipal operations through a detailed examination of the City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills. The objective of this research is to provide valuable insight for other Ontario municipalities looking for guidance as they consider declaring emergencies in their own communities. The research questions to achieve these objectives are as follows:

1. What are the best practices for declaring a climate emergency in Ontario municipalities?
2. What are the likely impacts on the operations of a municipality when a climate emergency is declared?
3. What were the impacts on the operations of the City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills when their climate emergencies were declared?

Methodology

This research used a case study approach to better understand the impact of declaring a municipal climate emergency in Ontario. City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills were the two case studies used in this research. The research was triangulated through the use of key theme identification in existing declarations, policy analysis of the case studies, and semi-structured interviews with two key informants from each municipality. The key theme identification in existing declarations reviewed 22 Ontario municipal climate emergency declarations to extract nine key themes that are being addressed by Ontario municipalities in their climate emergency declarations. Programs and policies initiated by both case studies in response to their climate emergency declarations were reviewed for their alignment with the

nine key themes and analyzed for their impact on municipal operations. This information was informed through key informant interviews and policy document review.

Findings

In a review of 22 Ontario municipal climate emergency declarations, nine themes were identified. The changes in municipal operations in the City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills after their climate emergencies were declared can be categorized based on these nine themes as demonstrated in the table below.

	City of Kingston	Town of Halton Hills
Carbon Emissions	*Strategic Plan*, Goal to Reduce GHG emissions by 15%, Greening Initiatives, Electrifying vehicles, Goal to reduce community GHG emissions, Density by Design, Organizational Restructure, Planning Department Policies, Climate Action Working Group, Carbon Offsets, 5-year Active Transportation Implementation Plan	Low Carbon Resilience Framework, Climate Action Task Force, Organizational Restructure, Urban Forest and Private Tree Management Strategy, Climate Change Resilience Strategy, Green Development Standards Update, Home Retrofit Acceleration Program, Low Carbon Transition Strategy
Economics	*Strategic Plan*, Electrifying vehicles, Goal to Reduce Community GHG Emissions, Density by Design, Carbon Offsets	Low Carbon Resilience Framework, Climate Change Resilience Strategy, Green Development Standards Update, Home Retrofit Acceleration Program, Low Carbon Transition Strategy
Ecological/Ecosystem	Greening Initiatives	Low Carbon Resilience Framework, Urban Forest and Private Tree Management Strategy, Green Development Standards Update, Stormwater Management Plan
Infrastructure	*Strategic Plan,* Greening Initiatives, Density by Design, Organizational Restructure, Planning Department Policies, 5-year Active Transportation Implementation Plan	Low Carbon Resilience Framework, Green Development Standards Update, Stormwater Management Plan
Societal Loss	Density by Design	Low Carbon Resilience Framework
Community	Community GHG Emission Reduction, Density by Design, Planning Department Policies, Climate Action Working Group	Low Carbon Resilience Framework, Urban Forest and Private Tree Management Strategy, Low Carbon Transition Strategy
Worldwide/Global	Carbon Offsets	Climate Change Resilience Strategy
IPCC		
Budgets	*Strategic Plan*, Electrifying Vehicles, Organizational Restructure	Organizational Restructure

This chart demonstrates that both municipalities addressed similar concerns after declaring their climate emergency, indicating that there is little connection between what is written in a climate emergency declaration and the consequent municipal operations. The key difference between the two case studies is the inclusion of ecosystem and ecological focused policies, programs and actions in their post-declaration climate action. Specifically, the Town of Halton Hills has prioritized ecological concerns, whereas the City of Kingston has prioritized elsewhere. This may be attributed to Action #7 in the Town of Halton Hills climate emergency declaration (Appendix B), which outlines the importance of healthy ecosystems and suggests actions to ensure their protection. While the City of Kingston does highlight the impact of climate change on ecosystems (Appendix A), there are no specific action items to ensure their protection.

Overall, the specific contents of a climate emergency declaration have a minimal impact on municipal operations. The City of Kingston and the Town of Halton Hills made different statements in their declarations, yet the resulting impacts on municipal operations are similar. Climate action can take many forms, and each municipality will take an approach that meets their specific needs. The key is that when a declaration is made, a shift in priorities towards climate action is advanced in the municipality.

Recommendations
To declare a climate emergency, Ontario municipalities should focus on the following five recommendations:

1. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
Municipalities should focus their declaration action items on the reducing GHG emissions. This can be corporate emissions, as outlined in the Strategic Plan from the City of Kingston or it can be a community reduction plan as seen in the Town of Halton Hills. Both case studies have demonstrated success in working towards reducing carbon emissions.

2. Growth and Development
It is essential for municipalities to address the environmental cost of growth and development when declaring a climate emergency. New development impacts land use patterns, which are one of the most impactful factors on climate resilience (IPCC, 2019). It is recommended that Ontario municipalities follow a similar path as the two case studies and propose new development standards to Council and consider the impact of land use patterns in their municipality.

3. Organization Restructure
Both case study municipalities initiated an organizational restructure within months of declaring their climate emergencies. In both cases, the restructure targeted sustainability and climate action and has impacted municipal operations. It is recommended that municipalities use this approach to prioritize climate action after declaring a climate emergency.

4. Create a Framework

In both municipalities, the climate emergency was used as a lens to establish a framework for moving forward on climate action. The City of Kingston Strategic Plan was informed by their climate emergency declaration, and the Town of Halton Hills created the Low Carbon Resilience Framework to frame their climate action as outlined in their declaration.

5. Consider Best Practices

It is recommended to reach out to municipalities that have declared climate emergencies to learn from their approaches. Read through climate emergency declarations that have been written by searching Council meeting minutes available online and review municipal websites for policy updates. The climate emergency declarations of Ontario municipalities that declared their emergencies between March 5 and October 1, 2019 can be found in Appendix C. Municipalities should actively learn from each other and establish a set of Ontario best practices, beyond the contents of this report, for declaring climate emergencies and moving forward on climate action in their municipality.

Conclusion

Declaring a climate emergency can act as a catalyst for a wide variety of climate action in a municipality. The contents of a climate emergency declaration have little impact on the municipal operations post-declaration. The key is that municipalities can use a climate emergency declaration as a way to prioritize climate action in their community.