WHAT DOES LIFE LOOK LIKE WITHOUT CARBON POLLUTION?

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking climate change will be solved at global conferences where regular people have little agency. But the battle to save the planet will be won or lost in our homes, on our streets and in our everyday lives. Transforming the entirety of human civilization is overwhelming — let’s start one neighbourhood at a time.

Most communities are designed to pollute. They encourage a lifestyle that was built on the destruction of Indigenous lands and racialized neighbourhoods and has clearly run up against its ecological limits. Not only that, our collective obsession with single-family homes and private vehicles is hard on our health and our wallets.

Fortunately, the opposite is true. We can transform our towns and cities to eliminate pollution and even offer a better quality of life with less financial stress. Communities all over the province and beyond are already getting started. But with climate disasters like wildfires and floods wreaking havoc on people’s homes and businesses, we must act more quickly and decisively than ever before.

While provincial and federal governments usually have the resources to create programs and rules for climate goals, municipalities often make decisions with big impacts. Housing and transportation policies affect how much carbon pollution their residents create. Complete communities with multi-family housing and public transit burn far less fossil fuels because they allow people to get around without a vehicle, and heat or cool their homes more efficiently.

Our food and energy systems also need an overhaul to tackle carbon pollution. Eating more local, wild or sustainable food that’s grown or raised in our communities means we can rely less on conventional agriculture that creates greenhouse gases. And since B.C. has abundant clean electricity, our top priority must be to electrify everything that currently runs on fossil fuels and bring in strong efficiency standards for buildings and appliances.

Decisions about land use, transportation, food and energy must include the Indigenous Nations whose lands and waters our communities are built upon. Not only is it crucial to avoid further violations of their rights, Indigenous Peoples have aspirations for their territories and the residents who live there. Many Indigenous Nations have plans to reconnect critical ecosystems they’ve relied on for millennia, provide homes for their members and newcomers alike, or produce the food and electricity people need. Every community in this province should listen to Indigenous residents and neighbours as we embark on this collective effort to eliminate carbon pollution together. Thankfully, you don’t have to do this alone. In the process of transforming our towns and cities, we can correct long-standing inequities stemming from the way they were built. With major public investments, these upgrades will make life more affordable at a time when the cost of living in this province is out of control. Municipal elections are coming up across B.C. Now is the time to demand a new kind of community for a new kind of climate. Read on for practical steps your local leaders can take.
**HOMES ARE WHERE THE HEART IS**

Driving people away from communities fuels climate change. B.C.'s housing and climate crises are deeply intertwined. When there aren't enough homes in cities, people move further away to afford space. With less services and employment available, that means they need a polluting vehicle. Larger, detached homes also use more energy. These details not only mean more carbon pollution, they’re also more expensive.

When transportation and housing costs are taken together, it’s actually more affordable to live in Vancouver than Langley.

Consider what residents often like about suburban neighbourhoods — they’re quiet, safe and green. But these aren’t actually a function of having less people, just less cars. Unfortunately, the same things that exclude traffic from these areas are the ones creating it for others. Cul-de-sacs keep through traffic off streets but force people to drive everywhere. It’s only once you add basement suites, multiplexes and townhomes that you have enough residents to support reliable public transit.

Doubling urban population density reduces carbon pollution from household travel by almost half and home heating by 35 per cent. But in Metro Vancouver, 80 per cent of the land is reserved for 30 per cent of households. Possibly the single most effective action local governments can take to fight climate change is to end bans on apartment buildings via single family zoning.

Not everyone needs to live in a high-rise to tackle climate change. Apartments known as “five floors and corner stores” can create neighbourhoods with high density and low carbon emissions. Building towers around major transit stations and upgrading ageing malls to new town centres creates central transit hubs, but it’s equally important to make sure everyone has access to daily needs like a grocery store and childcare within a short walk or roll from home. Lots of this new housing should be non-profit, co-op, social or otherwise non-market. And it all should be built to the highest emissions standard. There’s also the reality that new apartments, while far cheaper than existing single-family homes, still come at a premium. Governments at all levels need to build green public housing as fast as possible so everyone has access to energy efficient, climate resilient, affordable homes.

When cities build new housing it’s crucial to minimize parking, with a few spots for disabled folks, car-shares and charging stations, as well as ample bike storage. That makes it easier to eliminate fossil fuels from the home. Maybe it’s more appropriate to call them hero pumps?

Once local factories are churning out heat pumps, they will only get cheaper as we go. In Europe and Asia, in the meantime, we are lucky to have a public utility in this province to incentivize electrification for the public good. Debates on the upfront costs of this technology like the ones currently on offer from provincial and federal governments worth $11,000 combined — mean ratepayers can actually save money on their bills while also saving the planet. BC Hydro should work on making sure all households including renters and low-income people have access to this technology.

Energy upgrades are the best way to free up even more power for all these new electric appliances. Better insulation, energy efficiency and smart meters can lower household power use. While the province is likely to have surplus power for the next decade, it will eventually need more renewable energy. That gives us time to build a framework for communities to generate their own power.

Indigenous Nations have major renewable energy ambitions and many want to produce power on their territories. Rather than independent power projects that created windfall corporate profits at the expense of the financial health of our public utility or building megadams that run roughshod over human rights, BC Hydro should partner with Indigenous Nations. That way our electricity system — crucial to tackling climate change — can remain in public hands through joint ownership by Indigenous Nations and the province.

**PLUGGING IN COMMUNITIES**

Most Neighbourhoods Exclude More Families
Let’s face it — traffic sucks. It’s stressful. It’s noisy. It sucks up precious time with our loved ones and fills our communities with pollution. In B.C., transportation accounts for 39 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. It’s also pricey. For many households the cost of owning a vehicle is their second largest expense after housing. 5 It doesn’t have to be this way.

Public transit should provide an affordable, reliable, clean option for just about everybody in the province. While some communities have quality transit service, we’re a long way from that elsewhere. Mobility is a basic human right. Nobody should have to own a vehicle, and pay for gas, insurance, parking, maintenance — not to mention debt and depreciation — just to get around. Electric vehicles are great when they’re truly necessary but they remain a poor use of resources and space. To fight climate change we need less vehicles, not just cleaner ones.

Clearly, the government’s climate plan, recognizes that. It commits to a 25 per cent reduction in vehicle miles travelled across the province by 2030. 7 That will require a major change in strategy away from spending billions adding lanes to urban highways and investing in quiet transit everywhere instead. We should be spending as much on public transit as we do on other necessary social programs like healthcare and education.

In practical terms, that means TransLink building Surrey light rail, the Broadway subway to UBC and a line to the North Shore all at the same time and starting now. It means reactivating old rail lines up to Vancouver Island and the Sea-to-Sky corridor. It involves rolling out rapid, electric, frequent transit service in growing centres like the Fraser Valley, Okanagan, Greater Victoria, Nanaimo, Kamloops and Prince George. It requires moving forward with high-speed rail to Seattle and Portland as soon as possible. Finally, it includes creating a vast network of new protected bike lanes and connecting all communities with regular public interurban bus service.

With the exit of Greyhound bus service across western Canada there’s an urgent need to connect rural and remote communities. Indigenous Peoples and rural alllies successfully fought for a regional bus system in the North and now B.C. should offer similar service on a publicly-owned bus network across the province. 8 For low-income residents who can’t afford a vehicle, Greyhound bus service was instrumental in getting to appointments, accessing education, and visiting friends and family. It’s clear we cannot rely on private carriers to provide these vital links.

If all that sounds like a fantasy, consider that 100 years ago there was an electric tram line all the way from Vancouver to Chilliwack, passenger rail from Victoria to Courtenay, streetscars along every major artery in Metro Vancouver and train service connecting the entire province. 9 We once had a great transit system, we just ripped it out with the rise of private vehicle ownership after World War Two.

Most of the planning necessary to develop a thriving public transit system has already been done. TransLink recently announced its 2050 strategy with 310 km of new rapid transit lines for Metro Vancouver. 10 It foresees nearly all residents having a bus that comes at least every 10 minutes within a five minute journey of their home. B.C. Transit has 25-year plans for every community it serves. 11 It’s only a matter of accelerating those blueprints and providing the resources necessary to do so this decade.

**MOVING BC FORWARD**

When talking about ending our reliance on fossil fuels, many doubters will point to transport trucks stockpiling shelf spaces. Getting fresh tomatoes from Mexico without carbon pollution is admitted some years away yet, but why must we rely on fall off lands to feed us? In an era of worsening droughts and floods, grocery prices are already rising and the more food we can provide close to home the better. 12 From nitrogen fertilizers to farm equipment to transportation to spoilage, industrial agriculture is extremely polluting, accounting for about one-third of global emissions. 13 While we all need to eat, the consequences of our food system are staggering. Every calorie we grow, raise or harvest ourselves is one without all this pollution. Growing food in our communities can also offer protection against the wild price swings climate disasters bring. Thankfully, there are countless solutions to feed everyone without also feeding climate chaos. Futuristic technologies like hydroponic vertical farms and lab-grown meat and dairy products are well on their way to communities near you. 14 Indigenous peoples managed these territories for generations to provide for hunting, fishing and gathering. Given the opportunity to bring their traditional foods back to abundance, they could feed their nations and sell harvest licences or wild food products to the rest of us. Finally, good old fashioned gardening has often provided people with sustenance during times of great need. Vegetable gardens planted to gardening has often provided people with sustenance during times of great need. Vegetable gardens planted to vegetable gardens planted to food. 15

What would it look like for our communities to produce as much food as possible? Warehouse farms growing vegetables and cultivating meat just blocks away from our doors. Local programs for gardens on every kitchen countertop and in every backyard. Healthy rice to fill all fish there’s always enough

**FEEDING THE FUTURE**

Photo: Bus in Port Moody (Peter M. Epp)

Photo: Members of Wet’suwet’en Nation fishing (Garth Lenz)

Photo: Waste is another climate disaster. Feeding everyone in a warming world is a challenge but nobody needs to go hungry. Doing it without making the climate crisis worse requires communities to get creative and learn to share.

*British Columbia’s Future Public Transit Map*
COMMUNITIES IN THE WAKE OF FOSSIL FUELS

Every community has a vital role to play in ending carbon pollution. But for certain regions, ending their reliance on fossil fuels comes with additional challenges. Northeastern B.C. in Treaty 8 territory has about 70,000 residents, many of whom have moved there for jobs in the gas industry.

Towns, cities, and Indigenous Nations in the region now have to figure out what life looks like once the world doesn’t want its gas any longer. If the province is to wind down its fossil fuel production, it needs a plan to support the workers and communities who currently rely on it. These places have lots going for them but need investments from provincial and federal governments to transition successfully. They are affordable places to live and with the right supports could attract new residents and businesses long into the future.

Blueberry River First Nations has a vision for community-led restoration efforts in its territory. After winning a landmark Supreme Court case upholding their treaty rights against the cumulative impacts of resource development on their territory, the nation has negotiated $65 million from the provincial government to restore their lands and waters and protect the cumulative impacts of resource development in communities across the region can help them prepare for a changing world. And the same principles apply to resource towns all over the province — from Kitimat to Eékday. Proactive support for these communities means they can spend the next decade preparing for the end of fossil fuels. B.C. needs a comprehensive, community-led plan for the northeast to ensure the region’s success well into the future.

For more info:
https://www.wildernesscommittee.org/ClimateSolutionsNow

**Take Action**
Ask your candidates in October’s municipal election if they will make your community work for the climate!

- Will they allow townhomes, multiplexes and apartments to be built everywhere?
- Can they bring urgently-needed public transit to get residents out of their cars?
- What will they do to support local food grown within your community?
- Will they ban gas hookups in new buildings and encourage electric heat pumps?

Write a letter to your local newspaper editor about the kind of community you want to live in. Let’s get the conversation started before the upcoming elections!

WildernessCommittee.org/ClimateSolutionsNow

**Yes!**
Here’s my gift for local climate solutions!

Your donation supports critical climate action work — from organizing with communities against fossil fuels to advocating for climate solutions across the province. Thank you!

Enclosed is: [$35] [$50] [$150] [Other $]

For more info: info@wildernesscommittee.org

**Credits**

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