



**DAVID SUZUKI
FOUNDATION**
One nature.



IMAGE: GREEN ENERGY FUTURES

HOW TO ASSESS YOUR LOCAL CLIMATE PLAN

Climate action plans can seem overwhelming at first glance.

They're often packed with details and language that aren't accessible to the average person. This mini-guide should help you understand the most important parts of your local government's climate plan and determine how effective it is. Once you understand your local plan, you'll be better prepared to talk to your local representatives about taking climate action.

In general, there are two types of climate plans: mitigation plans and adaptation plans. Mitigation plans detail how greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced over time while adaptation plans explain how a community will adapt to some of the effects of a changing climate. This guide focuses on climate mitigation plans.

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HOW TO ACCESS YOUR LOCAL CLIMATE PLAN

Climate plans can usually be found on a municipal government's website. Try searching for "climate change" or "climate plan." Sometimes climate plans are included in broader municipal initiatives, so searching for terms like "sustainability," "emissions," "clean" or "green" might also lead you to the right place. If you can't find the plan online, phone or email your municipal councillor to ask if they can direct you.

You can also contact the staff responsible for your municipality's work on climate change. Look for job titles such as climate change specialist, sustainability planner, energy and environment director or climate manager.

It's important to build relationships early on with these key staff members and your elected councillor. Check out our guide for working with municipal councillors and staff for more information on that.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CLIMATE PLAN

It's easy to get lost in the details of a climate plan. We recommend focusing on four main elements:



The plan's focus on equity



Ambitious targets based on up-to-date science



Actions that add up to meet the targets



Ways for residents like you to monitor the government's progress and success

1. A focus on equity

Until recently, most municipal governments have neglected to address equity issues in their climate plans, and many still do. We have a lot of work to do to ensure underserved communities — including Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, people with disabilities and low-income people — benefit from the transition to a low-carbon society and are meaningfully involved in decision-making. Governments at all levels must ensure their climate plans benefit everyone and don't burden people who are already struggling.

Every municipality in Canada sits on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples. Your local government must ensure the measures and solutions detailed in its climate plan specifically benefit Indigenous communities. These communities should be involved from the beginning of the process and have meaningful opportunities to influence the development and implementation of a climate plan.

Your local climate plan should also address issues of energy poverty, insufficient housing, unaffordable, unsafe or inaccessible transit options, environmental racism, underemployment, lack of access to financial supports and lack of green spaces in marginalized communities. Look for specific structures, committees, supports and plans that address these equity, justice and accessibility issues.



IMAGE: GREEN ENERGY FUTURES

Implementing an ambitious climate plan will inevitably lead to the creation of new jobs and the growth of industries that support the energy transition. However, there will also be big changes for workers transitioning away from high-carbon industries toward new energy sectors. A climate plan should include specific supports for job creation and training for workers, especially if the municipality relies on the fossil fuel sector or other high-polluting sectors for employment.



PUTTING EQUITY INTO ACTION IN REGINA

A 2019 report by researchers at the University of Regina and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives surveyed equity issues in Regina and offered recommendations for the city's Energy and Sustainability Strategy. These included establishing official committees on equity issues and a just transition, and ensuring these committees include people with the lived experience of marginalization to inform the planning process.

WHAT IS ENERGY POVERTY?

The Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners define energy poverty as “the experience of households or communities that struggle to heat and cool their homes and power their lights and appliances.” The average Canadian household spends less than three per cent of its income on home energy needs. Households that spend more than twice this amount on home energy services are said to experience energy poverty.

2. Ambitious targets based on up-to-date science

The science behind climate change is clear, and our emission reductions targets must reflect current findings. If your municipal climate plan was released before the IPCC published its landmark report in 2018, it likely needs updating.

What is an ambitious target for emission reductions and how do you know if your local government's target is ambitious enough? That will depend on a number of factors, but in general, if we want to stay below 1.5 C of warming, we need to reduce emissions by 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieve zero emissions by 2050.

3. Concrete actions that will achieve the set targets

A climate plan must include specific, concrete actions that will reduce emissions, and the reductions resulting from those actions must collectively add up to the plan's overall target.

For example, Halifax's climate action plan states that deep-energy retrofits of 100 per cent of residential building stock by 2040 will result in the reduction of 910 kt CO₂e of annual emissions. (CO₂e, or carbon dioxide equivalent, is a way to express the global warming potential of various greenhouse gases in terms of an equivalent potential of carbon dioxide.)

The plan should address all sectors the municipality can control, both fully and partially.

While it's impossible to prescribe a list of actions that will work for every municipality, all climate plans should include some major action categories. Look for the following in your local plan:

BUILDING RETROFITS AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Deep-energy retrofits can lower the amount of energy a building requires by 60 per cent or more, thereby reducing both emissions and energy bills. The reduced demand for energy can then be met with low-carbon energy sources. Retrofits and other efficiency measures for existing buildings not only save money and create jobs but also help keep our homes and businesses warmer in winter and cooler in summer.

BUILDING CODES AND ZERO-EMISSIONS NEW BUILDINGS

We need to make sure future buildings do not produce carbon emissions. Look for building codes or municipal standards that mandate all new buildings to be net-zero emissions within the next few years and specific policies for moving away from using fossil fuels such as natural gas in buildings.

PUBLIC TRANSIT AND ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

The transportation sector is the largest source of emissions in most municipalities. Addressing transportation emissions involves setting goals and strategies and making investments in public transit. We want to make sure our communities are safe and full of opportunities for active transportation, and it's important that transportation and land-use planning are aligned locally to enable stronger emissions reductions.



LOW-CARBON TRANSPORTATION AND ZERO-EMISSIONS VEHICLES

We need to move to zero-emission vehicles (including transit and school bus fleets) as quickly as possible. Many cities and provinces in Canada already have mandates for 100 per cent zero-emission vehicle sales, some by as early as 2030. Municipalities can install charging infrastructure and require new buildings to be electric-vehicle ready.

LOCAL, DISTRIBUTED RENEWABLES

To meet our climate goals, all new energy must be renewable and free of carbon emissions. Solutions like rooftop solar, energy storage and community- or Indigenous-owned renewable energy projects can play an important role in your local plan, particularly in provinces with a significant amount of coal- or gas-fired electricity.

UTILITY-SCALE RENEWABLES AND CLEAN ELECTRICITY

Some municipalities own or partner on large-scale renewable energy or energy-storage projects that contribute to an overall reduction in emissions. This can help ensure cleaner regional electricity, especially in provinces that have relatively dirty electricity grids.

GREEN LANDSCAPES AND REFORESTATION

Planting trees, greening municipal spaces and optimizing natural asset management to adapt to the effects of climate change and sequester emissions should all be included in municipal climate mitigation and adaptation plans.

INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS

Industrial and commercial sectors produce a large share of overall emissions in many municipalities. Look for specific ways that your local government aims to reduce emissions from these sectors.

WATER, WASTEWATER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

Our municipal waste and water systems also produce greenhouse gases. A climate plan can include measures to make water and wastewater systems more efficient, capture methane from existing waste facilities and divert waste away from landfills through recycling and composting programs.

4. Ways for residents to monitor progress

Current and future governments must be held accountable for implementing a climate plan and making sure it works. Your local plan should clearly explain how you as a resident can monitor the government's progress toward its goals. Governments should commit to regular, public reporting on progress. Look for details on how it will:

- Monitor and report on emissions reductions each year
- Establish short-term targets every five years or less
- Evaluate the successes of each program and policy in the plan

A good climate plan must have strong financial support and adequate resources. Look for an explanation of how various departments — from planning, public works and infrastructure to finance, emergency preparedness and municipal waste management — will work with council to implement the plan.

