Urban Climate Alliance

Accountability Framework Handbook

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Acknowledging the Responsibilities of Municipalities to Indigenous People

The Urban Climate Alliance would like to acknowledge that our work in four different municipalities takes place on Indigenous land. We believe that it is the responsibility of municipalities, in addition to other orders of government, to establish relationships with Indigenous nations and peoples in a manner that respects and upholds Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and treaty rights. Some municipalities have adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and have a responsibility to uphold and realize this commitment in their policy processes, programs, services and operations.

Municipalities must seek meaningful collaboration with Indigenous nations, organizations and people in decision-making processes. We believe that this responsibility should be an overarching municipal commitment, and applied to all policy areas including climate action. Municipalities should support Indigenous climate leadership and proactively work to ensure that climate plans include and benefit Indigenous people and communities, Indigenous-led organizations and Indigenous-owned businesses. Municipalities should take care not to obscure the specific responsibility they have towards Indigenous peoples by subsuming this responsibility under a broad ‘equity’ banner.

Each municipality must establish relationships with, and uphold commitments to, Indigenous nations and peoples based on the territory on which it operates. The Urban Climate Alliance believes this extends to all seven dimensions of municipal climate accountability which we describe in this handbook.

Introducing the Accountability Framework Handbook

When it comes to climate action in Canada, cities matter. As the places where 80% of Canadians live, and as jurisdictions responsible for roughly half of emissions, no federal or provincial climate strategy can afford to ignore the needs and challenges that face urban areas.

Each Canadian city has its unique challenges and advantages, representing the diverse geography and socio-economic fabric of the nation. But beyond these differences, cities share a variety of methods and face a number of similar challenges when embarking on municipal climate action.

The Urban Climate Alliance is a network of four Ontario-based municipal environmental organizations working to advance climate action at the city level. Members include Ecology Ottawa, Environment Hamilton, the Citizens Environment Alliance and Toronto Environmental Alliance. Drawing on a variety of sources, consultations with leaders in the sector (e.g., Climate Action Network Canada, Clean Air Partnership), as well as deep organizational experience, we have compiled this handbook to help cities navigate the ongoing challenge of advancing climate action in all corners of the country.

Our handbook includes a sketch of seven dimensions of municipal climate accountability, captured below.

The Seven Dimensions of Municipal Climate Accountability

1. Science-based emissions targets

Every good climate plan starts with a reasonable climate emissions target. But what is "reasonable" for Canadian cities? In what appears to be an emerging consensus, more and more municipalities are crafting climate action plans around targets commensurate with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) commitments to keep warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of this century.

While this may sound complex, it can be understood another way: cities must work to fully decarbonize by mid-century. Any credible action plan must be anchored around a target for 2050 or sooner, and will benefit from realistic interim targets that align with a community-wide plan to reach them.

This last point is especially important. Cities are often most clear and ambitious about the policy initiatives over which they have direct control, often referred to as 'corporate' emissions. In most cities, this usually accounts for around 2% to 5% of all of the emissions within the broader 'community,' or within the boundaries of the city. So, while retrofitting city facilities (corporate emissions) and electrifying municipal transit fleets (corporate emissions) are critical steps to attaining climate goals, so too are broader measures that reduce community emissions (e.g., through curbing urban sprawl, creating opportunities for homeowners to retrofit their homes, creating disincentives for car travel and incentives for alternative transportation options, etc.).

Questions to ask your municipality:

- ✓ Is there a climate change action plan anchored around strong short-, medium- and long-term climate targets?
- ✓ Do targets address the city's emissions profile (i.e. the greatest sources of emissions)?
- ✓ Are there other plans that incorporate climate considerations and goals?
- ✓ Is the plan community-wide with targets based on corporate and community emissions data?
- ✓ Are targets ambitious (i.e., in line with IPCC targets and aiming for complete decarbonisation by mid-century)?
- ✓ Do the emission targets cover consumption-based (i.e., life-cycle) emissions?

2. Clear policies and action strategy with specific outcome commitments

It's one thing to identify a reasonable and ambitious climate target and related plan. It's quite another to map out the various policies and strategies needed to attain a city's goals. This is especially salient in light of the long-term nature of the climate emergency.

On the one hand, we know that near-term action is critical. For example, at the time of writing, the United Nations tells us we have roughly nine years to avoid "climate catastrophe" by staying within the warming range of 1.5°C. This is an incredibly short window for the radical policy change required to

meet our goals – that is, to make massive investments and policy changes required to move municipal emissions curves sharply downward in cities across Canada and around the world.

On the other hand, climate change has been called a "long emergency"[1] because the action required stretches over decades, and its impacts stretch over millennia. Any meaningful climate action must be grounded in policy direction that goes well beyond the standard political cycle of a municipal council.

As cities wrestle with rapid reductions in community emissions, many are turning to the use of a "carbon budget" or "emissions budget." Here, rather than set a target and then use policy measures to attain it, the city uses its historical cumulative emissions along with its emissions reduction goal to estimate the amount of carbon it has left to burn to stay within its fair share of limiting warming to 1.5° C. Used systematically, every climate-relevant project must be weighed against the carbon budget in a "climate test," to determine if it will help or hinder progress towards the city's goals.

Successful policy and strategy also hinges on an understanding of climate change's relationship with other aspects of the environment, the economy and society. Different pathways and investment decisions will have impacts on job growth, equity, the viability of certain industries, the value of land and energy sovereignty, among a host of other issues. Cities cannot make progress on these issues by operating in isolation. It's critical that cities work in collaboration with regional partners (e.g., neighbouring municipalities), provincial and federal governments, and other cities and networks (e.g., Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Association of Municipalities of Ontario, C40) to foster peer learning and exchange.

Finally, consideration should also be given to the sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping concerns of climate mitigation and adaptation. That is, reducing emissions (mitigation) and responding to climate impacts made unavoidable by warming to date (adaptation).

<u>Questions to ask your municipality:</u>

- ✓ Is there a complete pathway analysis (comprehensive strategy/plan) for how to achieve the plan?
- ✓ Do other city plans avoid contradicting or undermining the commitments in the climate action plan?
- ✓ Does your city have an adaptation plan or adaptation efforts integrated into its climate action plan?
- ✓ Is your city working with other cities, regional partners, orders of government or collaboratives to develop strategies and meet climate goals?
- ✓ Does the strategy have clear, time-bound benchmarks and deliverables for reducing emissions in key sectors (e.g. buildings, transportation, waste)?
- ✓ Is there a carbon budget in line with IPCC requirements that is used systematically?

[1] James Howard Kunstler (2012). *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century*.

Example: Vancouver's Six Big Moves

Vancouver is a leading jurisdiction when it comes to developing medium-term strategies with clear deliverables. Vancouver's plan included having 90 per cent of people live within an easy walk or roll of daily needs, having two thirds of trips occur by active transportation and transit, and having 50 per cent of the kilometres driven on roads be by zero emissions vehicles by 2030. In addition to this, all new and replacement heating and hot water systems will be zero emissions by 2025, and embodied emissions in new buildings and construction projects will be reduced by 40 per cent by 2030.

3. Funding and investment

When it comes to budgeting for climate action, there are two considerations to keep front of mind. First, taking ambitious action on climate change comes with upfront costs. There's no way around it. To reach our targets, bus fleets need to be replaced, buildings have to be retrofitted, charging stations and heat pumps have to be installed.

However, the second thing to keep in mind is that climate action expenses are in many cases investments that yield major dividends over their life cycle. Switching out energy sources and investing in efficiency means massive amounts of money can be saved over the long term, even as short-term investments spur green jobs.

A climate-friendly budget is one that has dedicated, consistent funding for climate action projects, alongside knowledgeable and effective staff to get the job done. It means spending more in the right areas (e.g., transit, active transportation) and much less in the wrong ones (e.g., urban sprawl, highway widenings, fossil fuel investments). To this end, cities (as well as the federal government) are increasingly adopting "climate lenses" - a framework that evaluates climate impact of a given program or capital investment, and scores its viability accordingly.

A climate-friendly budget also ties in with a related investment strategy. For example, municipalities around the world are now looking at ways to divest their holdings from fossil fuels. In some cases, municipalities are applying comprehensive lenses to guide their investment strategies. Toronto, for instance, was one of the first municipalities in Canada to develop a Green Debenture program. This allows the City to capitalize on its low-cost borrowing to finance green capital projects.

Finally, no climate plan is complete without the staffing needed to implement it. Skilled and knowledgeable staff dedicated to areas such as climate mitigation, communications and community engagement (noted above) are central to achieving municipal climate goals.

<u>Questions to ask your municipality:</u>

- ✓ Has the municipality committed to adequate and dedicated funding (e.g. green bonds, parking fees) for full implementation of the climate action plan?
- ✓ Has an analysis been conducted on the potential benefits and harms of specific funding mechanisms to particular groups and communities (i.e,. has an equity lens been applied)?

- ✓ Can these commitments be tracked clearly in the annual municipal budget process?
- ✓ Is the municipality divesting from projects that add to its emissions (e.g., road expansions, sprawling development) and investing in projects that lower emissions?
- ✓ Has the municipality put forward a plan to divest its pension and other funds from fossil fuels?
- ✓ Has the municipality adopted an integrated ESG ("Environment, Social and Governance") or similar approach to its investment portfolio?
- ✓ Has the city adopted a climate lens to guide its programs and capital investments?
- ✓ Does the municipality have a sufficient climate mitigation staffing contingent?
- ✓ Do the climate mitigation staff have deep and sufficient understanding, skills and knowledge needed to support local climate action?

Example: Ottawa's divestment motion

In December 2020, Ottawa City Council moved that staff would "evaluate the prudence of divesting of fossil fuels" as part of a broader change in investment strategy. The scope of this review includes looking specifically at divestment from stocks or mutual funds with coal, oil, and gas companies,and selling off all fossil fuel holdings from large fossil fuel companies over a five-year period.

4. Communications and community engagement

Above, we noted how all successful urban climate plans ultimately hinge on reducing community-level emissions in line with IPCC requirements. No plan will be successful without effective public engagement to mobilize community climate action and build durable support for system-level measures. Furthermore, broad and deep engagement is important for animating resident participation and leadership, building resilience to climate shocks, and ensuring that desired social, economic and equity co-benefits are realized.

Key to this effort is effective communications, long-term engagement efforts, as well as accessibility and accountability through regular and transparent reporting. Cities should develop a range of strategies to support meaningful engagement by residents from diverse backgrounds and ages. Factors such as language accessibility, meeting venue, location and time, and working with trusted messengers should be considered.

Good public-facing climate communications can help to make the City's policies and programs more accessible and encourage civic engagement. Clear branding like Toronto's "TransformTO" climate plan or the Town of Whitby's "Zero Carbon Whitby" can help to rally support and maintain consistency when sharing updates.

<u>Questions to ask your municipality:</u>

- ✓ Is there a communications strategy for the climate action plan?
- ✓ Is the climate action plan accessible and open to the public?

- ✓ Have there been multiple and on-going efforts made to engage the city's communities as part of the process of developing and implementing the climate action plan?
- ✓ What steps have been taken to proactively engage groups or communities that have been historically or continuously excluded from municipal policy-making processes?
- ✓ Has the municipality demonstrated proof of participation in or support for climate mitigation projects led by community stakeholders?

Example: Hamilton's Passive House Standards

In Hamilton, Passive House is emerging as the gold standard for not only making buildings climate resilient from an energy point of view, but for enabling the construction of new social housing units and for retrofitting existing units in order to create high quality living spaces that are much more affordable to operate and maintain. A Passive House (aka Passivhaus) structure is defined as ***"a building, for which thermal comfort (ISO 7730) can be achieved solely by post-heating or post-cooling of the fresh air mass, which is required to achieve sufficient indoor air quality conditions – without the need for additional recirculation of air."*** In the CIty of Hamilton, Passive House has become a recognized building method through the tireless efforts of Indwell, a not-for-profit social housing agency that has pioneered the use of this construction method for its facilities in Hamilton and beyond. Indwell's efforts have inspired the City of Hamilton to commit to Passive House for all new social housing developments. In addition, Hamilton has made its mark North America wide, in partnership with The Atmospheric Fund, through the retrofitting of the Ken Sobel Tower -a social housing complex located near the city's harbourfront. This retrofit to Passive House standards, is the largest of its kind in North America, making Hamilton a community leader where Passive House construction is concerned.

5. Data, monitoring and reporting

According to the old expression, "What gets measured gets done." No climate action plan will succeed without regular data collection, thorough monitoring, routine reporting and iterative improvements on the long-term plan.

Cities need to invest in the staffing and systems required to provide routine and accurate reports of the status of their progress against the most important metric for climate action – that is, community-wide greenhouse gas emissions. Along the way, cities can also provide a host of metrics on any number of climate-related indices (examples in footnote below).

When it comes to climate reporting, frequency matters. Each city emissions report – ideally released in an open, accessible format stripped of jargon and misleading analysis – is an opportunity for the public to respond, for community groups to mobilize and for the media to capture the evolving story. The report should provide insight on why the city has (or has not) met its community-wide emission reduction goals, what measures it envisions for near- and long-term progress, and what its track record of success (or failure) has been, to date.

Questions to ask your municipality:

- ✓ Is there a robust and transparent monitoring and reporting process for the climate actions set out in the plan?
- ✓ Does your plan include clear timelines for implementation?
- ✓ Have these timelines been met so far?
- ✓ Does reporting on emissions take place on an annual basis?
- ✓ Are there available metrics on climate-related indices[2]?

Example: Ottawa's emissions reporting cycle

In response to pressure from the community, the City of Ottawa altered its original schedule of providing greenhouse gas emissions inventories from a four- to five-year period to an annual period, starting in 2019. This change in the emissions reporting cycle allows for more detailed analysis of year-over-year variance in progress towards climate emissions goals. At the same time, it also provides more frequent and regular opportunities for the public, the media and councillors to engage in discussions and debates over the course of the City of Ottawa's progress on climate action.

6. Climate governance and public accountability

Effective climate governance should include opportunities for public input and feedback, and clear and transparent reporting systems that foster public understanding, support for action, and accountability for delivering on government commitments. Processes can take the form of public consultations, forums, town halls and workshops, at which city policymakers elicit input or feedback, share progress or report-back on outcomes.

In addition, cities should establish participatory structures that enable residents and members of civil society to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of climate policy. The membership of these structures should reflect a city's diverse communities and civil society stakeholders with lived and professional experience.

It is important for city policymakers to be clear and transparent as to how feedback received from both the public and members of participatory structures will be used to inform decision-making, so that processes are genuinely meaningful and not tokenistic. Proactive measures should be taken to enable

[2]Examples adapted from The Climate Reality Project's annual National Climate League analyses include: kilometres of bike lanes per capita; number of electric vehicle charging stations per capita; fuel expenditure per capita; annual waste tonnage per capita; gigajoules of renewable energy plus energy conserved through city-led conservation programs per capita; total annual trips by public transit; annual number of severe injuries and deaths using active transportation; percentage of municipal territory under tree canopy; and municipal walk score.

participation and remove barriers, especially for historically and continuously excluded groups, including providing financial, translation and logistical support.

Questions to ask your municipality:

- ✓ Has your city taken proactive measures to ensure climate governance is inclusive and accountable to the public (e.g., periodic reporting and public consultation opportunities to review progress and provide feedback)?
- ✓ Has your city established specific structures to strengthen participation by civil society and impacted communities in decision-making processes (e.g., a scientific peer review panel, resident reference panel, community advisory group, or a multi-stakeholder body)?

Example: Windsor's Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Office

In Windsor, a small office within the city's administration manages a mounting number of environmental policies and programs, including several specifically focussed on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The small staff have been responsible for organizing the City of Windsor's response to its climate emergency declaration. Climate risk analysis across the city's administration and a community carbon budget were two early activities of the office in response to the climate emergency declaration. Windsor's Community Energy Plan (2017) maintains a community advisory group organized through the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Office. The office also maintains collaboration with other cities through organizations such as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy.

Example: Toronto's TransformTO Reference Panel on Climate Action

The City of Toronto convened the TransformTO Reference Panel on Climate Action to shape plans and recommendations brought forward by City staff to a public consultation in fall 2019, as part of developing the City's 2021-23 climate implementation plan. The Panel —composed of 30 randomly selected Torontonians who broadly represent the demographics of Toronto— spent three days learning and deliberating about ways that, in the coming years, their City government could help reduce Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions. Panelists were asked to review and respond to new climate action ideas, and were given license to develop their own. They were also free to recommend changes to any of the City's climate-related efforts that were already in progress. The Panel's final report and recommendations is publically available on the City of Toronto's website.

7. Social equity

Climate change will disproportionately impact individuals and communities already experiencing marginalization and inequity. For example, low-income populations may face increasingly higher utility bills to heat and cool their homes relative to their household income (i.e. "energy poverty"). That's why it is critically important to ensure that an equity lens or analysis is applied to all municipal climate plans, policies, and programs.

Furthermore, it is important that policymakers enact measures that go beyond simply reducing or preventing harm, and identify and prioritize actions that directly benefit equity-seeking groups. Climate action can be a significant opportunity to develop a more equitable, inclusive city. A well-crafted climate plan will seek out "co-benefits" to climate action, so that emissions can be lowered while cities simultaneously respond to other concerns or take advantage of other opportunities (e.g., housing retrofit investments that reduce emissions while helping vulnerable residents and creating good, low-carbon jobs).

Questions to ask your municipality:

- ✓ Has the city ensured that an equity lens is applied to its climate plan, policies, and programs?
- ✓ Has the city considered how its plan benefits or negatively impacts different communities and equity-seeking groups?
- ✓ Does the city have a plan to consult with Indigenous community members (e.g., Toronto's Indigenous Climate Action Summary Report)?
- ✓ Has the city explored the potential to integrate social equity goals into green sector and low-carbon jobs strategies?
- ✓ Has the city taken proactive measures to include equity-seeking groups in climate-related decision-making processes?
- ✓ Has the city explored the potential for climate action to create green jobs and develop a low-carbon jobs strategy?

Example: Developing a Climate Justice Charter for the City of Vancouver

The City of Vancouver has committed to developing a Climate Justice Charter as part of its Climate Emergency Action Plan. The idea for the Charter was proposed by its Climate and Equity Working group, which was established to provide guidance on the development of the Plan. The Charter will be developed with disproportionately impacted communities, will identify how City staff creating climate policy and programs can better address and integrate equity and racial justice. It will include equity indicators, guidance on targeting economic benefits to marginalized populations, and a methodology to conduct a budget analysis with an equity lens to inform the prioritization of City investments.

Next Steps for Municipal Climate Action

Climate action is the challenge of our lifetimes. The actions undertaken by governments today will have profound effects on people and the planet for many generations to come. Cities – across Canada and around the world – have an opportunity to lead in the fight against climate change while solving social challenges, generating jobs and improving the health and well-being of their communities.

But cities won't act unless we demand it. Behind every government and every elected politician is a group of voters. Empowering those voters to demand accountability on climate action has the potential to make our elected leaders that much more ambitious on the question of climate action.

We hope you will use this tool with that aim in mind. We also hope that you'll join the growing networks of people and organizations exchanging tips and best practices honed by experience.

To reach out to the Urban Climate Alliance for more information, contact any of the names below.

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- Lynda Lukasik, Executive Director, Environment Hamilton – llukasik@environmenthamilton.org
- Emmay Mah, Executive Director, Toronto Environmental Alliance – emmay@torontoenvironment.org

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