



# Operationalising a Climate Lens Throughout Departments: Information Sheet

A part of the Climate Accountability On-Ramps Handbook

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# Overview

## Issue:

- Climate/sustainability planners are often expected to do all of the work on climate for your community despite climate impacting every department.
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## Rationale:

- More local governments are asking staff to operationalize a climate lens throughout all departments.
- Collaboration will encourage staff buy-in and be a driver of continued inter-department collaboration.
- Increases climate literacy among staff.
- Get climate considerations built in at the outset of the project review rather than as an add on before a report goes to Council.
- Enable consistent, comprehensive and transparent communication of climate change risks and opportunities to the Council and the public.

## Screening tools for council reports

Climate screening tools are lists of questions that staff are expected to answer, usually as a required section in all reports to Council and standing committees.

## Example Questions

Here is an example of a simple list of questions used by North Saanich BC

- Will it decrease the use of fossil fuels?
- Will it help us to capture greenhouse gasses?
- Are there partnerships and/or programs we can leverage to increase impact?
- Does it consider the full lifecycle of infrastructure?



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- Does it hinder or enable equity and access for all?

[Golden, BC uses this simple checklist](#) for Climate Change (Mitigation/Adaptation Relevance)

- To what degree does this issue bring climate change relevance to bear?
- Does a decision represent a meaningful mitigation or adaptation move for the municipality?
- Could current or future policy better or worsen climate change considerations?
- Are there metrics that could be used here or is this a relative or anecdotal commentary?

## A Triple Bottom Line Approach

Some Councils have adopted a triple bottom line approach.

[Saskatoon SK](#) requires administrative reports to any committee, or to city council include a Triple Bottom Line analysis.

“Triple Bottom Line” means an approach to sustainability whereby environmental health and integrity, social equity and cultural well-being, and economic prosperity and fiscal responsibility are integrated into decision making in a way that produces equitable solutions and mitigates undesirable trade-offs.”

## Municipal Climate Lens Tool

The Climate Action Partnership has developed this red-yellow-green approach in their [screening tool](#) which considers efforts to reduce GHGs and rescue precipitation and heat exposure impacts.

To take a broader systems approach to screening, the [Planetary Health Policy Design Tool](#) has been developed by District of North Vancouver Councillor Megan Curren in partnership with the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria.



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# Climate Lens Motions

- [Victoria BC](#): Resolution for application and Integration of a climate lens.
- [Aurora, ON](#): Resolution to include a climate lens approach in Town operations and governance.
- [Sudbury ON](#): Motion to have all reports presented to Council include content re alignment with CEEP goals.
- [Brantford ON](#): All City staff reports to Council will now include a Climate and Environmental Implications section that in some cases will quantify emissions related to Council decisions, and/or provide staff recommendations to add sustainability metrics to relevant initiatives.

## Sample motion for implementing a screening tool:

WHEREAS on the \_\_\_\_\_, the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ officially declared a climate emergency to name and deepen its commitment to protecting its economy, its ecosystems, and its community from climate change;

AND WHEREAS on \_\_\_\_\_, the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ approved *Insert Climate, adaptation or Emissions Plan* that outlines goals that must be met to reach the climate emergency's target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050;

AND WHEREAS meeting these goals will require numerous actions to be undertaken by the municipality, local stakeholders, and the public;



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THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ directs that all reports presented to Council or Committees of Council include content which describes how the recommendation or information aligns with the CEEP goals and where appropriate the impact on greenhouse gas emissions.



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# Case Studies

## Calgary - informal, councillor-led

Former long-term (20 years) Calgary City Councillor Druh Farrell effectively encouraged staff to implement climate lenses in their work by working one on one with each city department. Along with this work she published a series of 24 [blogs](#) on social media (after each meeting she held) to inform the public, increase staff accountability and celebrate successes.

In her view, the lack of climate action, despite some recent very costly climate disasters, stemmed partly from:

- departments needing to feel they have permission to move on climate - a climate plan is not enough,
- pockets of resistance could hold back an entire department,
- lack of departmental coordination on climate to maximize opportunities,
- lack of departmental budgets for climate action,
- the need to recognize that every staff member is part of this solution, and
- the need to build climate expertise among current staff and require new staff to be climate literate.

Her goal was to shift staff mindsets, and this took a series of meetings with each department to identify barriers, and provide opportunities to reflect on and prioritize climate.

She asked staff these questions in her meetings with each department:

1. Have you read the Climate Resilience Strategy?
2. How are you integrating climate in your vision as well as your day-to-day decision-making?
3. Have you identified specific staff and budgets to implement this work and



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- work with the city's climate team?
4. What are the key areas within the climate strategy that directly involve your group/department and how are you integrating climate consideration?
  5. How are you measuring/benchmarking climate outcomes?

Conclusions from her [summary blog September 21, 2021](#) and more from her blog [here](#).

Some of the positive outcomes:

- generated conversation about climate impacts among staff along with an increased sense of urgency,
- supported the emergence of climate leaders, and an increased sense of ownership over this issue,
- helped departments work together on climate as opposed to working in silos,
- ensured climate is considered upfront with project visioning and procurement, not as an afterthought, and
- a climate emergency was declared and passed which mandates department climate budgets and climate lens requirements, and a new staff position focused on climate.

Progress on climate action is now included in:

- staff reports to council, and
- staff performance reviews right up to the City Manager.

## **Brantford ON - staff led**

Their objectives for a climate lens were to:

- push quantification of impacts,
- generate discussion of issues,
- educate staff and council (climate literacy), and
- provide transparency on impacts and actions.



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### **What they developed:**

- a staff report section on all committee and council reports that includes:
  - a list of qualitative information to be provided for all projects,
  - quantitative information using unique lists for each department - they started with public works and housing.
- a calculator tool to quantify emissions:
  - includes comparison of assets which are to be replaced,
  - for each project: measured change in GHG, water use, land loss, tree loss, increases in impermeable surfaces, decrease in waste.
- an online portal:
  - for staff to upload information,
  - to produce quarterly totals of GHG increase or decreases from council decisions - to be shared annually with the public.

[Brantford ON Climate Lens Approach and Resources](#) webinar recording

## **London ON - staff led**

London ON started with a Climate Emergency Declaration that required the development of a climate lens process. The goal was to:

- support decision making,
- get all the climate issues on the table including GHGs, embodied carbon, adaptation, etc.
- ensure value, transparency and accountability.

They started with a generic set of questions to use in all departments, but after internal workshopping to test it on current projects, they ultimately:

- did extensive consultation among staff, workshops, and one on one conversions to define climate considerations for specific service areas,



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- collaboratively developed customized tools for each department that used language that made sense to each department,
- provided an implementation guide that would help when critical decisions are being made:
  - master plans, guidelines and strategies – provided issues lists,
  - existing and new projects/programs – questions on adaptation/mitigation customized by service area,
  - tool for departmental corporate emissions monitoring e.g. commuting, paper use,
  - budget process to ensure budget requests include GHG and climate impact information – climate considerations will be applied to the entire budget, and a carbon budget is a long term objective,
  - training programs for staff on climate literacy and cross work group collaboration, and
  - review/signoff process for record keeping – one champion in each service area.
- Applied process to current transportation projects and waste management process:
  - [Climate Emergency Screening Tool for Transportation Capital Projects](#)
- **Some initial outcomes:**
  - review of current road projects led to [cancellation of a high profile road widening assessment](#) – discussion shifted from moving cars to moving people and scope broadened to include equity issues,
  - [proposed subdivision rezoning put off](#) until a review of growth through a climate lens could be undertaken.
- Future plans:
  - Applying climate lens to other plans such as waste treatment, development charges, design specifications, and bylaw reviews.

Resources for London ON: [Webinar Recording](#)



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# Pushbacks

Challenge	Potential Solution
Lack of staff buy-in and understanding of how climate change impacts all areas of municipal work.	Provide training for municipal staff on how climate change is relevant to their department. <a href="#">UWaterloo's Municipal Climate Adaptation</a> certificate could be a good place to start providing specific courses on applying climate adaptation to various municipal roles including accounting & financing, community planning, engineering, and more.
A lack of staff capacity to add on the additional administrative burden of applying a climate lens.	Start with a simple checklist screening tool for council reports.  For project evaluation choose a few easy metrics already being tracked such as water use, canopy loss, corporate emissions.

## Resources:

### Briefing Notes from Clean Air Partnership

- [Municipal Climate Lens Resource Hub](#)
- [Integrating Climate into Official Plans 1](#)



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- [Integrating Climate into Official Plans 2](#)
- See also this [detailed analysis on how climate lenses have been applied in various Ontario municipalities](#).

## **Climate Caucus Resources**

- [Climate Caucus Municipal Grants List](#) - detailed list of relevant municipal grants
- [Policies and Resources Library](#) - list of motions, bylaws, council reports and briefing notes



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