



Climate Emergency Action Plan: Review Summary

Presented to: City of Vancouver

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We recognize that this work takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories including the lands of the three title-holding Nations: the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), s^kwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səłilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh). This land was never relinquished by these Nations to Canada or British Columbia through a treaty or other means; it is sovereign and unsurrendered.

As settlers on this land, we recognize the complex, violent, multi-layered and ongoing histories of colonialism and dispossession that have directly benefited settlers across the landmass known as 'North America'. Note that for consistency and clarity, our use of a number of terms follow urban planning definitions, though we acknowledge the limits and violences deeply embedded within this terminology, and are grateful to the contributions of Indigenous scholars and community members whose work informs our own. Through our work, we hope to build capacity and spaces of learning that centre marginalized histories, voices, and lived experiences. This can only be achieved through constant and continued decolonial action.

About hua foundation

Hua foundation is a youth driven non-profit organization based in what is currently known as Vancouver, British Columbia, on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories including the lands of the three title-holding Nations: the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̓lilwətaʔt̓ (Tsleil-Waututh). Our mission is to empower youth in the Asian diaspora to fully participate in advancing social change through exploring our racialized identities and building resilience in communities.

For more information, please visit hua foundation's website: huafoundation.org

This consultation was completed by hua foundation team members Christina Lee and Kevin Huang.

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Introduction

In late July of 2020, hua foundation was contracted by the City of Vancouver's Sustainability Group to facilitate an equity review for the forthcoming Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). This review included inline commenting in the draft policy document as well as a summary of broader comments regarding the application of equity and related frameworks.

The inline feedback and summary document are designed to complement each other. As differentiated from detailed inline draft feedback, the following summary piece is intended to provide guiding frameworks that can be applied at various levels of City processes, as well as across departments, utilizing specific examples from the CEAP to provide transparency into the processes through which we analyzed the policy draft and insights into the workflow and reasoning behind the feedback provided.

At hua foundation, we acknowledge that our ability to speak to issues of equity is limited to the experiences that we bring to the table, and recommend further direct and intentional engagement with communities who bring additional expertise often overlooked in municipal planning processes: including but not limited to members of the African diaspora, local Nations and Urban Indigenous communities, disability justice advocates, people experiencing houselessness, seniors and youth groups, folks with limited English-language capacity, newcomers to the country and city.

The feedback that follows operates under the acknowledgement that systemic racism and white hegemony/supremacy are the main contributing factors to inequitable policies, and a recognition of the need to dismantle these systems as the only solution to move towards equitable and justice-oriented futures. To achieve this requires full embodiment of equity principles and practices, deep interrogation of the processes that are taken for granted, and a full overhaul at the systems level to build equity into each aspect of day-to-day operations and thought processes. This requires commitment from all departments and actors in the process, and an ongoing, active process of learning and unlearning.

The following summary is categorized into three central themes: Assumptions, Consequences, and Embodied equity.

Assumptions: Shifting understandings of diverse contexts and situations at the beginning of the process

Embodying equity in planning requires acknowledging that the fundamental processes of engagement and decision-making are grounded in key assumptions of the needs and lifestyles of communities, that are most often rooted in white, upper middle-class hegemony and patriarchy. This requires deeper analysis of the aspects of life that are taken for granted and assumed to be fairly universal. These assumptions will go on to inform the main body of policies and by-laws, and thus are a crucial vector from which to improve equity.

An example of this is the concept of a nuclear family (two-parent household, with an average of 2 children), the unit on which a lot of planning is based; however, for many non-white cultures, multi-generational households are common, where seniors live with their grown children and their families, and manage many household duties and functions such as childcare, cooking, laundry, cleaning, etc. In cases when the entire household needs to travel together, public transit is not always a viable option, particularly when transporting young children and seniors with mobility constraints. It may also be more cost-effective to travel by vehicle than each individual family member paying for transit fare.

In the context of the CEAP, one major assumption lies in the concept of ‘complete communities,’ which are used to define an ideal living environment where community members are able to meet all of their daily needs within a short distance of their home. While the concept itself is not inherently problematic and while there is certainly value (arguably, necessity) in hyperlocal planning, this requires a deeper analysis of what is considered to be a person’s ‘daily needs,’ and based on what lifestyle. The assumption here is that most or all of the members of this ‘complete community’ adhere to similar lifestyles, when the reality is that neighbourhoods are often fairly diverse, with diverse needs that cannot be solved by a universal solution.

Key questions and examples:

- What aspects of life are missing?
 - We identified that religious or spiritual spaces, specifically non-Eurocentric religious spaces were not accounted for
- What lacks definition or specificity?
 - Food assets: are they contextually appropriate? Culturally specific? Affordable?
 - Healthcare: what is and is not considered healthcare? (e.g. traditional Chinese medicine, Indigenous healing practices)
 - Housing: is there an appropriate mix of housing? (recognizing that detached homes are not always “single family homes,” as they are often referred to)

Further, this contextual appropriateness often needs to be defined in a hyperlocal sense, as often even adjacent neighbourhoods have very diverse communities and needs. This means understanding that applying an *equality* approach (the same policies, tax rates, etc.) to every neighbourhood in the city is not an *equitable* practice, as these have disproportionate impacts on the people that live in those neighbourhoods.

CEAP Example:

- Broadly increasing bike share availability
 - What regions is this appropriate for/have existing appropriate infrastructure (e.g. separated bike lanes) for this to make sense?
 - Taking into account aspects such as geography/topography: is South Vancouver an appropriate place to put the emphasis on standard bicycling infrastructure when the reality of the topography is very challenging (SW Marine Dr to King Edward Ave has anywhere between 60-120m elevation changes) for most average or infrequent cyclists?

Finally, it is important to consider the starting point from which various communities come to climate action, often as an element of public engagement and education. It is worth noting that, to be able to make lifestyle changes in an effort to curb climate change is a privilege, and for many people at the margins, they are simply trying to survive and get by.

This raises key questions about the lens through which climate change is often viewed: as an option for those who have the financial means to take part in mainstream ‘green initiatives,’ as opposed to understanding the ways in which many low-income communities already take actions to reduce waste out of necessity, through reusing single-use items, purchasing ‘ugly’ produce, having backyard gardens, buying pre-owned vehicles and appliances, and eating less carbon-intensive proteins.

Rather than investing funds into new ‘green initiatives’ that may be far out of reach for low-income or other marginalized communities (e.g. ZEV infrastructure), it may be more beneficial to direct tax dollars towards public infrastructure that will increase accessibility and support all members of the community, such as last-mile transportation options. This comes with the understanding that investing in infrastructure that improves access for those who face the greatest barriers will be beneficial for everyone, rather than flashy new initiatives that only benefit those who have the buying power to participate.

Consequences: Examining potential secondary impacts

It is critical to consider the potential consequences of policies at the proposal stage, including secondary impacts beyond the intended outcomes. From an equity perspective, secondary impacts can be explored through intentional questioning along the lines of: who benefits, who is minimally impacted, and who is penalized? The following section provides some background and examples of how these questions work in practice.

Who benefits?

Considering who primarily benefits from an infrastructure upgrade or policy change is key to prioritization, where priority should be given to those policies and upgrades that support the most marginalized populations. This includes asking what barriers exist along a variety of access points (e.g. economic, temporal, physical, language, and other forms of accessibility). This is particularly important in programs that offer incentives for action or compliance, and in these situations it is valuable to interrogate the specific pathways to access and how people of varying needs and contexts may interact with these pathways.

Who is minimally impacted?

This question refers specifically to policies and by-laws intended to affect behavioural changes, with specific regard to those that offer monetary punitive measures (i.e. fees/surcharges) as a deterrent for discouraged activity. This requires understanding that for many people who have the disposable income and the privilege of choice, monetary disincentives are not always a particularly effective method for behavioural change.

Who is penalized?

Those who are less well-positioned financially are most likely to be disproportionately affected by monetary disincentives, as they often do not have the privilege of choice. For example, if a low-income individual's housing choices are limited by unaffordability to areas with inadequate public transit options, they may rely on a car to commute to work. Many lower-wage jobs do not have the option of telecommuting, and with limited infrastructure or options, this individual would likely be disproportionately affected by transport pricing.

CEAP Example:

- Market-based pricing on street parking
 - Working-class communities often live closest to commercial centres (where there would be high demand for street parking), as opposed to wealthier communities which are predominantly located in residential areas; therefore, if street parking prices are set based on demand, those in higher traffic areas will be impacted the most
 - E.g. comparing Shaughnessy to Chinatown, with Shaughnessy being a majority residential area with relatively low demand for street parking, compared to Chinatown being a more active commercial area and having proximity to the downtown core. By these definitions, Chinatown would likely have higher assessed street parking rates than Shaughnessy; however, residents in the West Side tend to be more affluent, whereas Chinatown is frequented by many low-income seniors and continues to be home to many low-barrier retail and restaurants

Framing shifts

All of these questions together suggest a call to shift the ways that needs are prioritized within policy: rather than designing policy to benefit the median, shifting instead to address the needs of the most marginalized, and recognizing that infrastructure upgrades and policy changes that uplift those that face the most barriers will also benefit everyone else.

Embodied equity: Building justice-oriented frameworks into standards of practice

Addressing Neutrality

Embodying equity in municipal planning processes requires acknowledgement of the harms that planning departments have historically and continue to enact on marginalized communities. This comes in many forms, including through direct policy action, but also through the erasure or omission of specific contexts of inequities, in the quest for rational objectivity or neutrality. While neutrality sounds good on paper, the reality is that the effects of systemic inequities are not distributed equally, and thus by refusing to portray comprehensive contexts into which potential policies will be enacted, it becomes more difficult to ensure that appropriate measures are made to address those disproportionate effects.

This can be mitigated in part through language use, and avoiding generalizations that do not speak to the full realities of lived experience. From the draft report:

For example, someone may be interested in getting rid of their car, but they live in a neighborhood where too many of their daily needs require driving. Or someone may be interested in walking, cycling or taking the bus to work, but is unlikely to do so if they don't feel safe doing so. Or someone may be open to switching to a heat pump when their furnace needs replacing, but is unlikely to do so if they can't find a contractor they trust to help them navigate the process. (Section 4. Where Vancouver's carbon pollution comes from and how we reduce it.)

This is one example of a section that would benefit from directly addressing some examples of how a person may be reluctant to adopt the new programs of the CEAP. Digging further into and explicitly naming community context can stake and highlight further work areas that may be necessary. The following provides examples of specific contextual analysis of the above statement, regarding why a community member might be reluctant to adopt new programs.

What are the historical reasons for why a person's neighbourhood may not be set up for other modes of transportation?

- Car-centric neighbourhoods planned intentionally for those with disposable income and access to a vehicle

For what reasons might a person feel unsafe cycling or walking to work?

- Relating to various intersections between race and/or gender

Why might a person have difficulty finding a contractor they feel comfortable with?

- Potential language barriers, or they are new to the city or country

Altering language choice to be more contextually specific provides readers (including those who enforce new policies and bylaws) better insight into the potential secondary impacts that might arise, as well as providing opportunities for staff to practice and reinforce thinking through an equity lens.

Path dependency

Finally, the CEAP and related policies suffer from path dependency: a predetermined course due to inequitable procedures built in at the systems level. For effectiveness, equity components should be incorporated from the beginning planning stages of any project; however, because there are often inadequate supports and training for equity-related work in individual departments, the reality is that equity considerations tend to be made closer to the end, from contractors, consultants, and working groups.

While the forthcoming Equity Framework will potentially shed some light into what this transformation could look like, it is of concern that many major long-term plans are already in progress, without a concrete definition of what 'equity' truly means, in application. This also calls to question how we move forward with these projects, while simultaneously dismantling these built-in systemic inequities.

The bare minimum of what this should look like, can be addressed along several vectors, including: project scoping and timelines, policy development, public engagement, and broader internal shifts. In order for equitable policies and actions to be realized, intentional work must both dismantle current oppressive systems and thinking while uplifting and centring the diverse range of realities and truths of marginalized people. The following are a few examples of more equitable practices, but not a definitive or prescriptive list.

Project scoping and timelines

- Incorporating equity-centred practices throughout project processes
- Prioritizing outreach and materials translation in project timelines (often there are major time lags between English language and translated materials, if they exist at all)
- Foregrounding engagement processes that are equitable (across various access points including language, time of day, location, etc.)

Policy development

- Have community experts with lived experience at the table during development stages (paid)
- Make intentional efforts to address affordability in future actions and plans as various forms of marginalization are inextricably linked to economic opportunity and outcomes
- Rethink policy as vehicles for centring *how* to be more equitable. Equity must be a focus alongside environmental, economic, and other specific goals (e.g. housing) as equity should not and cannot be just 'another lens'

Public engagement

- Public outreach and engagement in major non-English languages used in Vancouver (Cantonese & Mandarin/Traditional & Simplified Chinese, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Tagalog), with print materials ready upon launch
- Direct outreach and contact with community groups reflecting the ethnic diversity of Vancouver's residents
- Development of long-term relationship -repair and -building, and resourcing to encourage civic engagement with marginalized communities, noting that even within a community, there are diverse needs, as well as a wide range of avenues for engagement (language media, business associations, religions or spiritual communities, etc.)

Broader internal shifts

- Acknowledgment of the harm that planning has and continues to impose on various groups
- Comprehensive, usable disaggregate data (especially around race)
- Ongoing professional development and staff training on what equity looks like in practice for day-to-day processes as well as on a project-to-project basis

- Positions of influence for staff with lived experience, beyond consultancy or lower level work areas
- Internal supports in every department for equity-related work
- Create a culture of learning and unlearning, by actively sharing knowledge, blind spots, reflections, and emerging best practices across City departments and with community stakeholders

Conclusion

Based on our analysis of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, from an equity perspective, the element of greatest concern lies in the path dependency embedded within the Plan. While there are some ways to mitigate the secondary impacts that may arise, due to equity engagement falling near the end of project timelines, there are limitations on what can be course-corrected at this late stage. However, this can serve as a learning opportunity to better plan for equity in currently-in-progress and future plans and projects. Critiques in this summary have been outlined in such a way as to share thought processes and workflows for this purpose.

While many of the recommendations in this summary can be applied at a higher level across City processes, with specific regard to the CEAP, we recommend the following:

- Extension of and continued work with the Climate Equity Working Group, noting that engagement with the Working Group should be collaborative in nature and with terms of reference that allow for contributions by the Working Group to go beyond endorsement of plans and with avenues to hold the City accountable;
- Work with equity consultants from a diverse range of lived experiences, as well as the Climate Equity Working Group towards completion of the Climate Justice Charter, utilizing the feedback and recommendations provided above as guiding frameworks; and
- Active and ongoing professional development for staff and stakeholders regarding how equity is integrated into project planning as well as direct policy work, in particular as it relates to the CEAP and later-stage integration.