



Community Summary Report #4

Location: British Columbia, primarily Lower Mainland
and Vancouver Island

Partner Name: Columbia Institute



Community Partner: The [Columbia Institute](#)

Conversation Date: December 8, 2021

Report Date: February 23, 2022

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1. Introduction

A. Summary

The Columbia Institute’s community conversation “*What’s Next For Local Climate Action and Resilience for Local Electeds*” took place on Wednesday, December 8, 2021, following an exceptionally tough year for British Columbia as the Province was facing multiple climate, health, and socio-economic challenges. The conversation brought together local elected officials with the goal of sharing best practices, resources, and solutions for tackling these emergencies in their communities.

The conversation highlighted that local elected officials (Mayors, Regional Directors, Councillors, and School Trustees) recognize what needs to be done to alleviate many of the issues in their communities, but lack funding and resources to address them. Furthermore, it reiterated that systemic issues hinder progressive action from taking place and the urgent need for bold leadership. Despite this, the conversation offered many innovative solutions and initiatives that local elected officials are leading to strengthen community resilience across the Province.

B. About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project (GRP), a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Working with a designated partner organisation from each community, the GRP aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community’s conversation. Each Project partner organisation across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the GRP will produce a final report summarising findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the GRP is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The Project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic

Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenu de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts, and local partners

C. About the community partner organization

[The Columbia Institute](#) is an independent public policy think tank with a mission to foster and support leadership for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable communities. We believe that communities who value social justice, the environment, and strong local economies are healthier and happier places to live. We work with local elected officials to ensure they have the skills and networks they need to put progressive policies into place.

In collaboration with [NewStories](#), the Columbia Institute participated in the GRP to bring together Mayors, Regional Directors, Councillors, and School Trustees for a larger conversation on big-picture problems like climate change, unsteady incomes, and structural racism and discrimination. We also explored and documented the links between community resilience, income security, and the shift to a low carbon economy. We focused on the necessary action that these local elected officials could implement to foster community resilience.

D. Why this community was selected to have a conversation

Locally elected officials from across British Columbia were invited to participate in this community conversation. The Province faced an incredibly tough year in 2021 with multiple health, climate, and socio-economic challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the toxic drug crisis, the heat dome, and severe flooding and landslides. Furthermore, the Province faces ongoing housing and food security crises, with climate disasters exacerbating these issues.

Participants were progressive leaders in local government, with the ability to develop, share, and enact positive change within their communities. They were connected to networks across BC and were familiar with the conversation topics.

E. About the conversation participants

Participants were invited from the Columbia Institute's network of locally elected officials, particularly Mayors, Regional Directors, Councillors, and School Trustees. Columbia builds and supports a network of local leaders who set out to advance progressive values and ideas, to build sustainable, inclusive, and equitable communities. They discussed the key themes of community resilience, climate action, and income security. Additionally, we opened the invitation to individuals planning to run for local office in the Fall of 2022.

More than 50 participants registered for the conversation, with participants primarily attending from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.

F. The community conversation

The conversation took place via Zoom on Wednesday, December 8, 2021, from 9:30AM to 12:30PM. It was structured with four 15-minute breakout room discussions followed by a 10-minute harvest of ideas for each discussion led by Jenn Meilleur from NewStories and Kevin Millsip from Columbia. Conversation questions included:

1. How are the changes to your community's environment and economy affecting the most vulnerable people in your community? If possible, share a specific example.
2. What are the most important initiatives or approaches you are already doing related to climate and income security? Where are there already resources and momentum?

3. What would make the biggest difference in your community now? Where are the biggest barriers? What do you need the most help with? What would help advance this conversation and movement in your community?
4. Complete the following statements: (Final summary question)
 - Something that surprised me...
 - A theme I'm noticing...
 - A question I have...
 - One next step I will take is.....

The breakout group questions were designed in advance of the conversation and adjusted from the template questions provided to us by the GRP, to better reflect our community's knowledge of climate change, resiliency, income security, and socioeconomic and environmental policies.

The conversation was a success with fruitful discussion from local elected officials and planned next steps for the community to continue the conversation at High Ground 2022, the Columbia Institute's annual civic governance forum.

2. What we heard

A. How are the changes to your community's environment and economy affecting the most vulnerable people in your community? If possible, share a specific example.

The housing crisis has affected communities across BC significantly. "There used to be a part of the [Vancouver] Island that was affordable, but in recent years, housing prices have sky-rocketed". Communities are facing rising homelessness and eviction rates. With the changing climate, "the capacity to live outside in a safe way has been compromised".

Environmentally, the heat dome and climate has affected everyone, with close to 600 deaths across the Province. "Many folks lost their lives [during the heat dome], it was a huge wake-up call". Seniors, especially, were affected. "How many people were in their homes, and nobody knew they needed help?" "I'm 82 years old, folks my age are disappearing". Additionally, there has been a heightened awareness within coastal communities about possible sea rise and flooding and how this will affect the housing crisis.

In Metro Vancouver, housing prices are going up significantly and there are not enough shelters, let alone permanent housing for the homeless and underhoused. "The Province needs to implement a living wage provision for all of their contracts". Furthermore, officials across the Province continued to shut down homeless encampments during the pandemic without providing safe spaces for their residents. Public washrooms and gathering places closed and when the heat wave hit, there were few places to go.

In Cumberland, the pandemic and the impacts of climate change have put enormous pressure on the parks systems, with forests in the area destroyed from recreational and industrial over-use.

In the Comox Valley, there were four issues raised consistently in the recent campaign: climate, affordable housing, finding a family doctor, and protecting natural spaces. These issues were felt across age, gender, income, and race. Education was disrupted during the pandemic as some community members could not access WIFI or a laptop. Furthermore, this heightened food insecurity as schools play a role in feeding the most vulnerable children.

In Victoria, *Get Growing, Victoria!* provides seedlings and garden materials to citizens in need, including people disproportionately impacted by the ongoing pandemic. In 2020, over 81,500 edible

plants were grown, and 200 cubic yards of garden materials were distributed, supported by over 44 community partners that directly served over 10,000 households.

In Richmond, thousands of people are facing houselessness but it is hidden with many living on friends or family's couches. New city guidelines have stated that 10% of housing developments need to be affordable for any new developers, but some are taking over large green spaces. "How does the community protect these green spaces while also solving the housing crisis?"

In North Vancouver, many residents live in multi-unit housing so during the pandemic they often did not have a safe space to go outside. This has highlighted the disparity between renters and owners, as well as the importance of public spaces.

B. What are the most important initiatives or approaches you are already doing related to climate and income security? Where are there already resources and momentum?

Across the Province, there are several initiatives that are already underway related to climate and income security. However, more needs to be done. "[We] need to design and build communities that allow for localization, with the ability to shop within walking distance for example" and "lower the cost of transit [to] help climate and income [security]".

In the Comox Valley, a powerful and vocal group of youth, the Comox Youth Climate Council are leading the Green New Deal for Municipalities. These teenagers work together as they are worried about their future. "I see the resource we need is popular support". There is also the Food Policy Council and the Lush Valley Food Action Society. During the pandemic, they distributed food from farmers and restaurants to individuals and families in need. Comox's official community plan is climate centred, focuses heavily on densification, and promotes active transportation, but it has been hard to implement natural asset management and green infrastructure planning. "Our biggest challenge is working with staff to try to get the kinds of changes we want down to the public works level and into our bylaws."

In Courtney, there is the Warming Centre and Addictions Clinic which are being accessed by people across the Island. There has, however, been pushback on "progressive issues" so climate change hasn't been a priority.

In Squamish, there is the Food Policy Council and Climate Emergency Councils. They have developed a strategic plan with four pillars including climate and economic development. However, there are "challenges with prioritising highly skilled sectors for development [such as green tech] rather than lower-income, more traditional sectors."

In Summerland, they have hired a Sustainability and Alternative Energy Coordinator for the district who has "ramped up climate action work". They have launched an organic composting facility, a solar array and battery storage project, and a Community Climate Action plan.

In the Okanagan, they have initiated a bioregional food systems project and the Council supports the local food bank every year. Furthermore, they are working on establishing a food hub within the community.

In Gibsons, they are the only municipality that has valued wetlands and watersheds into an accounting system for the asset management process. However, this data collection requires a significant amount of funding to complete.

In Victoria, the city has allocated carbon within the Corporate Energy Emissions Management Plan. "It is exciting and ambitious" with the "aim is to have accountability and aid departmental and

divisional leaders [to] understand how they impact GHG reductions”. Furthermore, the city has fare-free transit for youth and there is demand for free transit for low-income residents.

In North Cowichan, the council adopted an updated Climate Action and Energy Plan, aiming to reduce the municipality’s energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.

C. What would make the biggest difference in your community now? Where are the biggest barriers? What do you need the most help with? What would help advance this conversation and movement in your community?

There are several barriers facing the Province such as the homogeneity of many communities, “old, colonial perspectives”, a lack of understanding of Indigenous rights and titles, as well as systemic racism across policies and institutions. “How does this group, who already support these issues, speak to, and engage with folks who may not be familiar, care, prioritise, or value these things?”. Furthermore, there is a barrier with the restrictions in the community charter, “the Province restricts the full capacity of regional districts and municipalities to address these pressing issues”.

Polarisation is increasingly being felt across communities. “How do we deal with polarisation, [and] make climate and social policy more appealing to a bigger universe?”

Possible Solutions:

- Assistance from other governments and agencies to gain a better understanding of reconciliation and colonialism.
- Empowering people from within the community to talk about the broader issues they are facing. People need to hear there is hope and solutions.
- Elect BIPOC individuals and historically marginalised communities to councils across the Province for both their bold leadership and their non-traditional/ creative approaches to working with very complex issues.
- Work across silos and departments on large issues such as climate, race, etc. “I don’t want to see it as a separate budget item.”
- Leadership changes to bring in “a fresh way of looking at things”.
- A just transition – “Transition must not destroy communities and livelihoods.”
- Funding – “We know the answers...Everything requires vast sums of money.”
- Bold Leadership - “these leaders will be elected from 2022-2026. Given our deadline of 2030 to make significant progress in addressing climate change and social and environmental justice, we won’t get a do-over.”
- Amplification of the issue of polarisation and how it is undermining democracy.

D. Complete the following statements:

- **Something that surprised me...**
- **A theme I’m noticing...**
- **A question I have...**
- **One next step I will take is.....**

“What stood out for me is the commonalities and challenges between the municipalities. How do the elected [officials] and bureaucracy align together? [I] see the urgency.”

“As a school trustee, I saw a focus on solving problems rather than asking if this is the right thing to do. Expediency drives everything, [and we are] disregarding the future...Let’s forget about our differences and get the best from everyone and have the courage to offend those who want to stay put in their own ways.”

“Anyone’s future is all of our future in a certain way... [We need to] shift our values so that when we’re making our decisions, we represent the values that we feel as human beings. We have a chance to reassess our values and what we can do together if we really put our minds to it.”

“[Why don’t we have a] progressive tax on property? We have a flat tax currently. We don’t do that with income, why do we do it with property? It would hopefully have an impact on folks who are building unsustainable housing.”

“[At the] local level we’re hampered in terms of raising funds. We can lobby our governments to change taxation. Have part of the sales tax, this isn’t really progressive. We’re not being brave enough.”

“[Something that surprised me is that there are] very few people outside of the lower mainland and Vancouver Island at this conversation, which is a shame.”

“[I’m surprised] about the issues that kept coming up during campaigning: climate change, affordable housing, more family doctors, protecting natural spaces. There is support for these ideas, even if we don’t hear it from our elected officials or certain other subsets of our communities.”

“How can we bring people together that are so seemingly vehemently opposed to basic tenets of social or environmental justice?”

“How hard should progressive councillors push for a progressive agenda? If we push hard, are we risking a rebound effect in the next election?”

“[I’m} Looking for ways to find common ground. How can we find common ground and get more people onside, even if they don’t necessarily agree on every single one of these issues? [We need to] focus on what we unify us, like housing for all.”

3. What we learned

Please summarise your perspective on the key points you listed in section two. Why were they important? Were they brought up frequently, met with contention, surprising to you or your facilitators, etc.? Was there a strong consensus on any of the key points?

The conversation aimed to gather perspectives on big-picture problems like climate change, unsteady incomes, and structural racism and discrimination. These issues have been exasperated by the multitude of climate and health emergencies that have plagued communities. It’s clear local elected officials are aware of what is needed in their communities to address these issues, but they lack resources and strong leadership. Furthermore, they are facing increasing polarisation as their communities face greater hardships including homelessness and food insecurity.

To what extent do you think your conversation built a wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.

- 1 - Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very much so

As elected officials, participants were aware of the links and synergies between community resilience, income security, and the low-carbon transition. However, they gained a greater understanding of the challenges facing other communities across the Province and the similarities of these issues. The discussion added to this understanding by providing suggestions from other communities that could enhance the Province's approach to resiliency. The conversation also reinforced, for a number of participants, the understanding that local governments are limited in terms of the legislative and taxation related tools at their direct disposal and that supporting actions and funding from higher orders of government are essential in making wide progress on these issues.

To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.

- 1 - Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very much so

Akin to the previous question, participants were local elected officials who are aware of the impacts of climate change and income insecurity on their communities. They did, however, network and connect with other elected officials which could inspire climate action from solutions that have worked in other communities.

To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.

- 1 - Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very much so

Participants were able to network with other local elected officials that face similar hardships in enacting progressive environmental and socioeconomic policies and initiatives within their communities. They were encouraged to share solutions and to connect on best practices and innovative initiatives. The conversation also served as a point of inspiration for those attending in terms of seeing that they are not alone by being concerned about these issues and trying to make progress on tackling them.

To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience? Please explain your response.

- 1 - Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very much so

Participants were encouraged to continue the discussion within their councils but also with other attendees on the call. Through sharing solutions and next steps, participants can bring these examples to demonstrate best practices and case studies from across the Province. Participants were interested in possible next steps coming out of the conversation and how they may continue to support one another.

In your opinion, what does the community need to do next to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?

This community needs resources from the provincial and federal governments to support their work in tackling the interconnected issues raised, for example, the climate and income security plans such as the Climate Action and Energy Plan in North Cowichan. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has begun the necessary work to address some of the significant funding issues.

Local governments should promote examples of policies, by-laws, and projects that have made headway and create analysis on best practices and lessons learned from these examples. These will support further work to promote resilience and climate action in their communities.

4. Next steps

The Columbia Institute plans to continue this community conversation at High Ground 2022, our annual civic governance forum. It's crucial that these participants continue these discussions as these issues: climate change, income and food insecurity, homelessness, etc., are affecting their communities daily.

At High Ground 2022, participants will be surveyed to identify which issues are most prevalent as we move closer to the municipal elections. The community conversation, alongside this survey, will inform programming for the next year and feed into how the Columbia Institute can better support local elected officials.

Finally, this report and the GRP's work will be disseminated with participants and our network. An in-person or virtual follow-up conversation may take place later this year.