

Moving Forward, Not Backward:

A Regional Agenda for Caring, Low-Carbon Communities After Covid-19

May 2020



Preamble

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of the private enterprise economy in British Columbia's capital region – how a temporary shift in consumer spending habits and government policy can immediately result in unemployment and economic insecurity for tens of thousands of working people in the region, and the closure of thousands of businesses.

The pandemic has also demonstrated enduring sources of strength, including the natural human inclinations toward co-operation, care, compassion and the rendering of mutual aid.

Finally, the pandemic has demonstrated ecological benefits arising from reduced impacts from human activity on the atmosphere and on fragile ecosystems, with substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂), which contribute to climate change, and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which impacts air quality and human health. Natural ecosystems are already demonstrating signs of recovery within the very short timeframe of declining economic activity.

As we look ahead to the post-Covid-19 recovery, and begin to consider the measures that individuals, communities and public and private institutions can take, it is worth considering retaining elements of the Covid crisis response on a steady-state basis, to respond effectively to three major crises that pre-dated Covid-19 in BC's capital region and beyond:

(1) the **Climate and Ecological Crisis**: which threatens the ability of species including humans to survive on planet Earth long term if greenhouse-gas emissions are not reduced sufficiently to keep historic global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels;

(2) the **Inequality Crisis**: which leaves thousands of people in the capital region, and more than a billion people globally, lacking access to the basic necessities of life, including secure housing and healthy food, while other segments of the regional and global population have hoarded wealth and resources far in excess of what can be consumed in a person's lifetime; and

(3) the **Opioid and Overdose Crisis**, which has resulted in the untimely death of an estimated 5,000 people in British Columbia, 15,000 people in Canada and 500,000 globally since 2016.

The capital region is also confronted with the ongoing impacts of **Colonization**, which has resulted in dispossession of Indigenous lands and disruption of Indigenous laws, culture, subsistence practices and governance systems, leaving Indigenous communities particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic and the associated social and economic crises.

Faced with the ongoing threat of the Climate and Ecological Crisis, the Inequality Crisis and the Opioid and Overdose Crisis, and the ongoing impacts of Colonization, **it is imperative that individuals, communities and public and private institutions act now** to implement the following measures to retain Caring, Low-Carbon Communities in the post-Covid-19 world.

Local Measures for Caring, Local-Carbon Communities

1. Endorse the following principles as the basis for post-Covid-19 economic recovery efforts:

- (a) The goal of economic activity is to meet the core needs of all, living within the limits of Earth's life-support systems, while caring for one another and caring for the planet.
- (b) Recovery efforts must align with recognition of human rights including Indigenous rights, with a focus on advancing equity, redistributing power and wealth, and eliminating systemic barriers to living full, safe and healthy lives, which are disproportionately faced by Indigenous people, women, people of colour, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, people with precarious immigration status, newcomers, refugees, people from ethno-cultural minority backgrounds and LGBTQ2S people.

2. Maintain a permanent reduction in retail and commercial sales of gasoline and other fossil fuels, to ensure that GHG reductions arising from the Covid-19 shutdown are retained on a steady-state basis in BC's capital region, through the following measures:

- (a) Retain the current **fare-free public transit** program on a 1-year trial basis.
- (b) Deploy the existing BC Transit fleet with **maximum service hours** for bus and handyDart to substantially improve service and equity, alongside fast-tracking the purchase of new buses and expansion of fleet maintenance facilities.
- (c) Immediately **implement transit priority** such as bus lanes on existing roads, to increase transit capacity, speed and reliability at peak periods.
- (d) Substantially increase public investment in **sidewalks, crosswalks and cycling infrastructure** in all areas, to support active transportation, public health and economic stimulus, including **road closures** to create **pedestrian greenways** within neighbourhoods.
- (e) Rapidly phase out the **installation of new fossil-fuel heating systems** in residential, commercial and institutional properties, and **expand rebate programs for zero-emissions heating systems**, solar power and other sustainable technologies, including front-end rebates to ensure equity.
- (f) Initiate a major program of **energy and seismic retrofits** for existing residential, commercial and institutional buildings, to pursue energy efficiency, seismic resilience, work-from-home capability and economic stimulus.

3. Ensure every person can live with security and dignity with access to the basic necessities of life, including housing, food, clean water, sanitation, health services, education, recreation and culture, through the following measures:

- (a) Permanently **convert** a portion of the regional supply of **transient accommodation** (hotels, motels and short-term rental units) into residential housing, with supports as necessary appropriate to individual needs.
- (b) Expand construction of **purpose-built, energy-efficient nonmarket housing** with supports appropriate to individual needs, to ensure a person's housing costs do not exceed 30 per cent of their gross income.
- (c) Maintain **access to safer supply** and supervised consumption services for people managing addictions, as part of a general policy of harm reduction and decriminalization, with increased public investment in detox, treatment and recovery services.
- (d) Facilitate a major **expansion of childcare facilities and services**, advocating to senior levels of government for proper training and compensation for early childhood educators.

- (e) Support the **regeneration of Indigenous food systems** and revitalization of Indigenous land-management practices, working in partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities.
- (f) Increase regional food security by implementing a **Regional Farmland Trust** without delay, to protect and ensure active use of the agricultural land base for food production, with encouragement for organic, regenerative and low-emissions farming methods, fair labour standards and increased access to healthy food for low-income people.
- (g) Expand **municipal support for food production** on private and public land, including distribution of gardening materials including soil, plants and educational resources.
- (h) Maintain and expand a high-quality network of **natural areas, trails and recreational facilities** throughout the region, including wilderness areas, parks, playgrounds and fitness facilities.
- (i) Develop a long-term strategy to **diversify the regional economy beyond the tourism sector**, including expanding **low-carbon and co-operative sectors** of the economy.
- (j) Introduce permanent income-support and funding programs to **sustain Arts and Culture** and promote community-building / cultural activities and facilities, through joint action by all levels of government.

4. Advocate to the Provincial and Federal governments to support Caring, Low-Carbon Communities through the following measures:

- (a) Provide **financial and regulatory support** for the programs and actions identified above.
- (b) Increase public revenues through the immediate **introduction of a Wealth Tax**, levied on a progressive basis on personal and corporate assets, a **more progressive Income Tax** and closing loopholes that allow Canadians to take advantage of tax havens.
- (c) Focus economic recovery stimulus spending on **building a robust non-market housing system**, integrated with health and social care, to permanently end homelessness and to ensure that everyone has access to housing and supports.
- (d) Support **expansion of the low-carbon sectors of our economy**, including caregiving, health and wellness, education, and arts and culture, to foster strong, resilient communities.
- (e) Support working people, economic stimulus and climate action by investing immediately in the **electrification and expansion** of local, regional and national **inter-city rail and bus networks**, under public ownership, operation and control, including bus priority lanes, LRT and other modes.

- (f) **Support Indigenous people and communities** to rapidly improve health, housing, water and social service systems, in a manner consistent with Indigenous rights, title and self-government.
- (g) Increase **income-support programs for unemployed people, low-income people, people with disabilities, senior citizens and people with precarious immigration status** through joint action by all levels of government to a level that allows a person to live with security and dignity.
- (h) Increase **protections and security for working people including provision of a Living Wage and appropriate social security programs**, with a focus on precariously employed workers, migrant workers, farm workers and workers who lack the protection and benefits provided by a collective bargaining relationship with employers.
- (i) **Grant permanent residency status**, or a pathway, or access to rights and benefits as workers and residents, to people with precarious immigration status, who have been rendered invisible in Covid-19 response efforts.
- (j) Embrace a permanent **policy of clean energy** and “Keeping the Carbon in the Ground”, through the following measures:
- i. Fund the **retraining of energy workers** and others in the clean energy economy.
 - ii. Provide **transitional income support** for energy workers and communities currently dependent on the oil and gas sector.
 - iii. **Support renewable energy** sources and **enhanced storage and delivery systems** to convert to all-electric power usage, prioritizing community-based and community-led energy solutions.
 - iv. **Withhold regulatory approval** and public investment for all new fossil-fuel projects, including oil and gas pipelines and wells, and immediately halt the Trans-Mountain and Coastal Gaslink projects, which are detrimental to the environment and to the economy.
 - v. **Divest from the fossil-fuel industry and end all public subsidies**, including current subsidies and any stimulus packages to oil and gas companies.
 - vi. Mandate the **decommissioning and clean-up** of existing well sites.
- (k) Retain emissions reductions in the aviation sector and other high carbon-emissions sectors by immediately introducing **Carbon Budgeting**, increasing the **Carbon Tax** and introducing the **Permanent Rationing of GHG Emissions from Aviation**, allocated on a per-capita, annual basis, with applications for exemptions considered on the basis of need by a federal Office of GHG Emissions Rationing.
- (l) Transition immediately to **sustainable management of second-growth forests** for carbon sequestration and biological diversity, including value-added production and legislated protection of old-growth forests and other sensitive habitat, with a just transition for impacted workers and communities.
- (m) Demonstrate **care for the natural environment** that sustains us all.

