

A large, stylized sun graphic composed of a grid of small dots, transitioning from white at the top to a rainbow spectrum of colors (orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) at the bottom. The sun is partially obscured by a dark teal and brown gradient background at the bottom of the page.

NEW COUNCILLOR MANUAL

As a newly elected councillor, what can you do to advance climate justice in your community?

A lot!

A growing number of local elected leaders across Canada have made climate justice a priority in their communities. Hundreds of local governments have declared climate emergencies and are pushing for action which aligns with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) science.

Local governments contribute [over 50% of national greenhouse gas emissions](#). Local government is where climate action is happening.

Be a part of the action in this critical decade - learn how to bring forward effective policy initiatives that will be supported and implemented. In fact, every decision can multisolve for intersecting challenges when viewed through the lenses of ecological limits, rapid decarbonization, and equity.

How do we
help you?

Working together, Climate Caucus members will be an unstoppable force for change and not relenting until we have achieved the vision of a network of equitable, regenerative, decarbonized, and resilient communities thriving within planetary limits by 2030. Our collective mission is called 1.10.Zero.

1 PLANET/10 YEARS/NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

CLIMATE CAUCUS  **1.10.ZERO**

Climate Caucus will provide you with:

- An opportunity to join a network of councillors who face similar challenges from across Canada and are eager to share support and ideas,
- A wealth of resources so you can present your council and staff with great climate action initiatives, already tested and ready to use,
- A national organization to lobby on your behalf to other orders of government for the resources and regulatory authority we need to achieve 1.10.Zero.

"Climate Caucus is so important because not all elected officials have local colleagues to share their climate vision and policies with. Not only can we develop sound implementable policies to address Canada's most pressing climate needs, but we are a support network ensuring elected officials are never alone in their climate battles. Words alone fail to adequately express the feeling of critical mass and hope." — Councillor London ON

Insider Tips

What we wish we'd known when we were first elected.

Once in office, you may find that getting climate policy through council can feel like a daunting task. Limited staff capacity and/or expertise, resistance to change, bureaucracy, limited legislative options, and constrained financial resources all serve to maintain the status quo.

"There were so many things I wish I'd known in my first months as a councillor, especially as a councillor wanting to implement science-based climate initiatives."
— Climate Caucus Councillor

This manual aims to provide newly elected councillors with practical knowledge and tools on how to get climate actions implemented. It draws on first hand experience from locally elected climate leaders in Climate Caucus.

The main message from experienced councillors?
You've got this! It's definitely possible to enact local climate policy. Our members have done it, and you can too.

How to hang in for the long haul

It is really good to have some kind of support, someone to give you a pep talk when you feel alone or overwhelmed, and it is important to find networking support beyond your local community.

"As a new councillor I have found it invaluable to learn from those who have more experience and have already passed resolutions and made changes that I am hoping to see in my community.

On many occasions I have reached out to the Climate Caucus group to find examples of bylaws, zoning, resolutions and resources, and have always found what I needed. It is an incredible resource." — Councillor, District of North Saanich BC

Join Climate Caucus and become part of our network!



Twice monthly zoom calls for electeds-only to network and share ideas



Regular newsletters filled with ideas, advice and resources



Members-only section on our website with access to our member directory, funding database and motions library



Expert advice and dedicated support from staff at any time

Jurisdiction: What local governments can do

Local governments are creatures of the provinces and territories and only have powers that other orders of government delegate to them. This means local government's don't always have the legislative authority/ jurisdiction to implement policy. For example, many local governments cannot require fuel switching, and they are bound by provincial and territorial building codes, but there are still many opportunities to be effective. This section provides a list of areas under municipal jurisdiction with high opportunity for climate-related interventions.

Relationships are everything

Newly elected councillors inevitably realize that they can't create policy or change direction on their own - at a minimum you'll need a majority of council to agree. Building strong relationships with fellow electeds, staff, and community make all the difference.

In this section, check out how to:

- Find and keep allies on council
- Think long term
- Listen and give a little (strategically!)
- Build cases that have broad appeal
- Beware of the spotlight
- Work effectively with staff and developers
- Engage citizens
- Build support among the public
- Work with other agencies

How to pitch an idea to council and not get shot down

"Climate won't be on the agenda, so you will need to find ways to apply a climate lens to every major decision."

Learn some tried and true approaches to get your idea passed at council:

- Basic Dos and Don'ts
- Leading with financials and focusing on local issues
- Anticipating pushback: the questions councillors always get asked
- Key Council procedures
- Ensuring implementation

The best resources for new councillors

The amount of reading you are expected to do can be overwhelming. We have assembled a short list of the best resources for climate friendly councillors.

JURISDICTION

What local governments can do

Transportation



- Support local public transit (e.g. bus lanes, shelters)
- Support electric vehicle use (e.g. charging stations)
- Support car sharing
- Reduce car use with bylaws (e.g. local roads, parking, pedestrian space, bike lanes, multi-passenger lanes, active transportation plans)

Buildings



- Energy efficiency requirements for buildings
- Education/rebates/financing for retrofits or heat pumps
- Green roofs, walls
- Allow/encourage tiny homes, laneway homes
- Regulate fuel use in buildings (note that the authority to do so varies by jurisdiction, so check situation in your community)
- Lead the way with buildings owned/built by the local government

Economic development



- Encourage local investment in green business ventures
- Create programs to support and incentivize local businesses to reduce emissions
- Develop local green business certifications
- Implement a sustainable/social procurement policy for municipal purchases to consider packaging, energy use, and local purchasing
- [Divest from fossil fuel investments](#) or advocate for others (e.g. pension plans) to do so
- Prioritize local banking

Ecosystem protection



- Protect and restore natural areas within the city or town
- Use nature based solutions (e.g. daylighting or bioswales) for stormwater management, flood/erosion control, etc.
- Plant/protect trees, encourage/require green roofs
- Replace pavement with permeable surfaces, effective rainwater management

Local food security



- Establish and support a local food council
- Provide space for community gardens, food markets
- Recognise and respect Indigenous protection and knowledge concerning local medicine sources and community gardening efforts
- Increase food security through bylaws (backyard hens, greenhouses, etc)

Waste management



- Collection of recycling and compost
- Support for local sharing, reuse, and repair
- Collect and dispose of solid waste responsibly, deconstruction bylaws
- Local rules on single-use plastics
- Sustainable procurement for local government purchases
- Support zero waste practices via bylaws

Land use



- Land use planning to minimize emissions while addressing social equity questions (e.g. density levels, transit planning, affordable housing plans)
- [Designate green/natural areas](#) as protected from development

Community renewable energy



- [100% renewable commitments](#)
- Community solar/hydro/wind farms
- Local distributed energy systems

GHG emission measurement



- Measure emissions from city government operations
- Develop a community GHG inventory
- Sign onto national and international commitments to reduce GHGs (e.g. [Partners for Climate Protection](#) or the [Global Covenant of Mayors](#))

Emergency response



- Plan for and deal with climate related emergencies such as wildfires and floods

For detailed initiatives local governments have implemented in each of these areas, see our [Councillor's Handbook](#).



BUILDING KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Council colleagues

Finding and keeping allies

“Be true to who you are – up front about passion for climate, but try to avoid creating unnecessary divisions between you and your colleagues or you and your community. The best advocates are compelling in their case, but don’t use climate as a wedge.”

You need your fellow councillors to pass resolutions – allies on council are essential. It takes a while to see who has power, who votes together – past councillors can be a wealth of knowledge for you.

- Work strategically – listen more than you speak. Be aware of the amount of energy you’re spending on any given action. Sometimes giving a little on something less significant can be beneficial in the long term.
- Encourage respectful discussion and keep a constructive relationship.
- Try to get to know your colleagues outside of council.
- Votes are important but not the only thing, leave room for more discussion.
- Be upfront, clear and compelling, but try to keep good working relationships.
- Never make promises you don’t personally have the ability to keep. You can’t make a promise on behalf of council.
- Try not to be discouraged when others think a little is enough – keep your eye on the goal (climate justice) and chip away at it from every angle.
- Council decides as a group, so you have the right and responsibility to participate in meetings and express your opinions, but they may not be the same as everyone else’s. Make the effort to formulate what you want to say and contribute productively to the conversation.

Think long term

“Think long term and strategically – don’t burn those bridges for a short term win – coercion and pressure create unstable outcomes.”

It will take longer to build consensus, but can be more effective in moving the community forward than forcing things through with a narrow majority.

You may not win all votes, but you can still move the needle and shift perspectives. “Longterm-ism” and capacity building are critical. Even if moving slow seems at odds with the task before us, work to build trust with those who disagree.

A lot of policies will take more than a term to implement, however, if one term is the amount of public service that you are able to give, for whatever reason, know that you can still make a very significant contribution.

Most councillors are surprised at the slow pace and the difficulty in bringing about change, but also learned to appreciate the stability that some obstacles bring ... and that those same obstacles will bring longevity when you can get things passed.

Listen and give a little

“Just the power of the idea isn’t enough – learn other councillors’ biases, priorities, what arguments they make”

Learn what priorities/motivations other councillors have so you can build support on different aspects for different people.

- Try to think like the other council members, speak within their realm and to their value base. Find arguments that extend beyond “climate” – for example, what are the economic and social benefits?
- Shine a light on issues and keep it positive.
- Avoid blindsiding – let them air their concerns. Learn from those and adjust your plan if possible.
- Listen to and build support from outside of your echo chamber, sometimes common ground can be found in unlikely places
- Bring in concerns about legal consequences, insurance costs, and other economic impacts to build support for climate action.
- Identify co-benefits – how can your plan help increase affordable housing? Attract newcomers to your town?

Beware of the spotlight

“Being labelled the climate champion isn’t always a good thing.”

Think about who should take the lead when pushing issues... being the “strongest” advocate won’t necessarily make you the most effective at getting it passed.

There are dangers in being labelled the “climate champion” because others may not contribute, and you get blamed when things don’t happen or have problems.

- Bring others on board for this work, a single vote can’t pass new policy.

- You need to be a vocal supporter but not seen as a one trick pony because people may not feel they can count on you for other things. Using climate as a lens to view all policy will be new to some councillor's, staff, and community members, but be patient and persistent.

Staff – your biggest roadblock or your greatest ally

“Meeting the wall of staff capacity and interest can be very frustrating for a new, idealistic councillor who can feel ostracized when every new idea is dismissed.”

Why staff are important

Staff have order and structure on their side, as well as longevity. They are way more organized than the council, and can run circles around new councillors. Many great ideas have disappeared into that black hole “referred to staff” where they lie at the bottom of the priority list until they are forgotten.

Staff will see projects first, so the fact that staff is highly involved before council is the norm. None of us are experts, but ideally staff will be competent and inform us well. If at times you are feeling lost, it is probably normal! You can learn from staff about past efforts on a particular climate action.

If your relationships with staff are poor, there can be a lot of stonewalling and a negative attitude toward councillors. Don't assume that you are on the same side, but try hard to work together.

Some councillors have come to think of local government as a bit of a game with two teams who are not on the same side: staff and council debate the outcome.

But when council develops close relationships with administration, a lot of work gets done behind the scenes.

When asked by the public about sub-optimal work by staff, acknowledge concern, but don't throw staff under the bus. A good response: “Council and staff are always looking for ways to improve, and those are useful suggestions/ point to areas where we can do better”

Know your role

One way to turn staff against you is to try to do their job. Some electeds are criticized for playing a “staff role” rather than a council role. Be really clear what rests with the council and what jobs are the purview of staff - if you aren’t sure, ask.

Get to know staff

Your first contact can be by asking for a thorough orientation. If you are not getting a good enough orientation, raise it as an issue. Politely insist on getting better oriented, and if you don’t understand, keep asking.

- If you are allowed to talk directly with staff, find out what they do, what their concerns are - do a lot of listening.
- Be sensitive to dynamics with staff, learn and understand what they’re working on and where they have information that’s important, without barging in.
- Help them learn your concerns so they can address those BEFORE things are at the Council table, and your questions can be seen as unexpected criticisms.

Build a great relationship with your CAO

The CAO holds a lot of power because they have control over the staff priorities, and can influence Council’s agenda. As well they know so much more about how things work than do councillors, especially new councillors.

While they have a wealth of knowledge of municipal operations, CAOs generally lean towards maintaining the status quo and can block a project by underlining the lack of funds for new initiatives.

- The CAO can prevent councillors from talking directly with staff, limiting access to info.
- Don’t expect this to be a friendship, but do build a relationship based on mutual respect.
- Sit down with your CAO and find out what their preferred approach is to dealing with the deluge of public feedback that you will receive.
- Under the direction of the CAO, the CFO also wields a lot of power as they manage, process, and allocate funds for new projects. The Corporate Officer (or Clerk) can also make a difference as they set council meeting agendas and so have power over what gets discussed at Council.

Check out our webinar on [Councillor-CAO Relationships](#)

Key departments

Engineering staff

These staff construct or supervise infrastructure projects (e.g. roads, stormwater management) and review outside proposals for construction projects (e.g. new housing development).

They are often the best funded department and can be very traditional in their approach (e.g. may prefer to install a pipe than to preserve a wetland for natural flood control).

If you use the language of “asset management”, where long-term planning and risk analysis are focused on protection and cost-control, you can help them understand the imperative of acting on climate change and the value of natural assets.

Planning staff

Planning staff work with stakeholders to set policies for land use and development.

They provide support and advice to Council on long term plans, Official Community Plans (OCPs), and bylaws, and they review specific development approval applications.

- Planning departments manage public consultations on long-term urban planning proposals and specific development proposals.
- Planning staff know all the rules and how they can be changed when it comes to land use policies and developments.
- By the time you see a development proposal at council, planners will have worked out a lot of important details and potential concessions to get the development approved.
- Some local governments have Social Planning positions within this department and they may be allies to advance equity and social justice.

The public – how to build support

"If you can't find allies on council, you may have to go back to the people."

You need their help

You are much more likely to get climate action through council if there is strong public support from diverse sectors.

Having the support of local community organizers is critical as they can bring on board large numbers from the public e.g. they could run an environmental campaign with groups coming in to speak to council, school presentations, one on one meetings with councillors, gentle/positive pressure from many directions.

- Seniors can be useful allies as they demonstrate the breadth of community support and tend to vote in greater proportions than other age groups. They may escape the greatest effects of climate change, but have younger friends and family who won't.
- Youth can wield a lot of influence as well and deserve a voice.
- Hear what councillors have to say on [youth and local government](#).
- See our [Youth Infiltration Manual](#) for a lot of good information for anyone who works with or in local government.

You need diverse support

Having diverse groups supporting a proposal is very important – bring people to the table that the mayor and other councillors may not typically hear from.

Build broad external community support for things you'd like to see your council support; avoid being seen as a niche lobby.

- Remember to hear views from the "other side" – join groups like Chambers, local business groups to understand views other than your own. Get involved in a variety of organizations eg. Boards of trade/Climate Caucus/port authority – say yes to invites/seminars as your schedule permits.
- Be aware that some grants are available to registered non profit groups that aren't available to local governments so we need them on board.
- Think carefully about how you're framing things to bring in a broader audience e.g. building a better community versus solving the climate crisis.

POWERFUL ACTORS CAN INCLUDE:

- Indigenous communities and governments
- Social service providers
- Major businesses, especially if they are big employers
- Downtown business associations
- Chamber of Commerce
- Developer associations (home builder associations)
- Resident/community associations
- Places of worship
- Unions (either work unions or student unions)
- School district boards
- Surrounding local governments
- Port authority
- Service clubs like Rotary
- Environmental groups
- Youth organizations
- Special interest associations and civil society groups (depending on the project, it can range from heritage societies to seniors groups to sports clubs)

Help public supports be more effective

“Is there a way you can strengthen community groups, give them a bigger voice, introduce them to each other?”

Many groups are working in isolation; once they find each other, they can have power together. Groups like [Climate Hubs](#) and [Future Ground Network](#) exist to do just this, and both partner with Climate Caucus.

Encourage public supporters to be as positive as possible:

- Include appreciation for work done,
- Promote a positive future,
- Avoid adversarial approaches which can backfire, feel like blackmail - “do this or we will fight you publicly”,
- It is harder to say no to a positive ask because it feels like you’re letting them down,
- Climate/environmental committees are usually made up of really passionate people, but can lack focus.. Help them understand what falls within local jurisdiction and what is required to make change - a challenge is lack of constituent knowledge of jurisdiction.



Share our [Youth Infiltration Manual](#) to help climate advocates of all ages understand how to be effective change makers at city hall.

How to engage residents

It is important to include the social sector (ensure equitable access), business sector, all levels of government, citizens with lived experience, etc. and try to meet them where they're at.

- Push for better citizen engagement tools.
 - [Bang the table](#)
 - Can look to [King Township](#) to see how it's working.
 - [Tamarack Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
 - [Citizen Lab](#)
 - [Placespeak](#)
- Example from a resource town (50% logging, 50% tourism):
 - Elected leader facilitates a large forestry committee with stakeholders from logging companies, government, First Nations, etc. By being together at the table regularly, they do find solutions together. Advice: electeds should do no more than facilitate, let them work it out!
- Podcast on digital democracy: [New ways of empowering the public](#)

Developers

Although there is usually no formal negotiation process with developers built into local government, a lot of negotiation does take place, usually between developers and staff. There are opportunities to ensure developers consider emissions, equity and planetary boundaries.

General tips

- Recognize that developers are diverse and many want to do things right.
- Work to build good relationships, but be firm on what your community needs - develop a thick skin!
- Be aware that pushing developers can raise building costs or make them walk away, so take the time to understand your local approval process, and when and how to intervene.

Finding support for your position

- Make sure your CAO and staff are onside, and understand that Council does expect all developers to abide by the process and rules. Then be prepared to stand your ground.
- Remember council can turn projects down, and it can help if you have good input from the public and from environment and heritage committees.
- The public plays a key role as often developers won't budge until the public organizes and protests.
- You and staff can push developers to meet early in the process with key community groups and First Nations.

Helpful tools

- Environmental organizations can offer valuable information e.g. best practices for lakeshore development, community needs around active transportation.
- Have a clear community plan developed with meaningful engagement so that when you are making decisions, you can point to a fact based reason for decisions, especially around climate and housing. Once you as council have made sure that sustainability goals are in your official plans, then everyone knows the rules.
- Ensure strong standards that are up to date, e.g. include EV charging requirements, energy efficiency standards, accommodation for transit, bike storage.
- Build carrots and sticks into bylaws and policies, e.g. some BC councils created incentives for developers to use higher levels of the provincial buildings Step Code.
- If needed, engage in conflict resolution early and often.
- Development permit areas are one way to set standards for certain areas.
- Development cost charges(DCCs) can be used to collect fees to compensate or to get concessions, e.g. offer to waive these in social housing projects, although that does mean lost revenue.

How to get developers inside

- It may or may not work for you to establish and foster relationships with local developers, but it doesn't hurt to get to know them and do some listening. One council created a development group where staff meet with developers on a regular basis, to give developers information on what standards the council will expect.
- Meet with them early, for example on a site visit where you can use some soft diplomacy indicating what would make you more likely to support this project.
- Don't get caught up in their story and tell them you can do it, but listen to what they are saying,
- Remember that once a proposal is at the council table, you can't amend it, just accept or reject. So find out early what is being proposed and see where there might be some leeway.
- Do what you can to help cut red tape, remove barriers, but have a clear, consistent approach so they know what to expect.
- See our webinar: [Local Governments and Local Developers Working Together to Transform Buildings](#).

Working with other agencies

General tips

There will be times when you want to advocate for change with provincial/crown agencies, your MLA or your MP.

- Plan ahead so you are up to speed on the issue and have a very clear, specific ask with the pros and cons well laid out.
- Find common ground - learn what you can about who you're meeting with (interests, background, what they're working on, etc.) so that you can identify and highlight areas of common ground. Climate action intersects and overlaps with so many other areas so there is always a way you can build on what they are interested in to frame the conversation around issues you both care about.
- Always start with some appreciation - they are people, too in a challenging job, so if possible find something very concrete that you can genuinely appreciate e.g. some earlier work they did for your community or even some general work in an area of your interest such as support for women's rights.
- Now that you've got them listening, you can make your pitch, but allow lots of time for them to talk, too. This is your time to actively listen and to use open-ended questions to find out what they think. It is through listening that you can find out their concerns and fears, and do your best to respond to them.
- Make your pitch, be very clear about what you want them to do and why, and be ready to incorporate the needs and concerns you have just heard.
- Follow up with a copy of your ask, a thanks, and indicate that you will be following up - and then do so.

HOW TO PITCH AN IDEA TO COUNCIL

— and not get shot down

Basic dos and don'ts

Be sure to:

—
“Try and know more than anyone else in the room about this issue.”

- Know if this has been done before and how it was received – check with current colleagues, past councillors and staff to see what has already been considered on an issue. This isn't to say things can't be tried again, it's just important to have context to be most effective.
- Come prepared: cover all your bases and leave no major questions unanswered.
 - Where has this already been done successfully? Bring examples of other communities who have done this successfully – see case studies in the [Councillor's Handbook](#).
 - Come with diverse public support, not just from the expected groups. See section on [public engagement](#).
 - Know funding options.
 - 1-10-Zero: identify ecological, GHG and equity impact.
 - Align with OCP, bylaws, strategic plan or other existing efforts.
- Be prepared with alternatives, so you don't have to make these up on the fly.
- Get your CAO on board ahead of time if possible, and ensure you have financial and staff capacity.
- Draft a resolution ahead of time and clearly word your motions so there is no room for misunderstanding in implementation.
- Build in accountability – how and when will you know this action is in place and working well? (and follow up).
- Only after all that, get on the agenda.

Try to avoid:

- Underestimating optics and emotions.
- Appearing to break new ground: it is harder to pass a new program that isn't linked to existing plans/projects.
- Bringing unjustifiably high costs for the city budget.
- Surprising key staff or your allies on council and among staff – fill them in ahead of time and see what questions you need to address – build support for the vote.

Language

"Start by painting a picture of that better world, then bring in the climate."

Sell economic benefits, especially in resource based places!

- Lead with compelling arguments to extend the case beyond climate. You may need to lead with financials.
- Financial arguments work with different values – if you can show a net saving, then they will go along with that, e.g. financial benefits of charging more for parking to reduce congestion, allow for more restaurant patios.
- Later they may come closer to the climate issue because they can recognize co-benefits.
- You may be able to show that green infrastructure costs less than grey and saves on the parks and flood control budgets.

For changes that increase costs (e.g. higher parking fees or congestion pricing):

- Try to present specific financial benefits to those groups, e.g. revenues could be targeted for specific projects these users like, as opposed to vague spending plans.
- It is worth the effort to tie specific revenues to specific spending and build that into the budget to get public buy in. Note this isn't possible for regional districts in BC with less flexibility than local governments.
- Examples:
 - Vancouver got pushback on congestion pricing because it was seen as a general revenue grab.
 - New sewage line to avoid pollution of the swimming lake, had to be sold as improving property value and usable land in yards.
 - When changing fuel sources for heating or type of lighting, focus messaging on health and household savings.

Keep things optimistic

- Focus on climate success and data to engage the public instead of the doom and gloom of it all.
- Use simple, everyday language and tell local stories people can understand and develop relationships
- Think about your audience and how they will hear our words: Which group is your primary focus? Remember, the majority of Canadians support climate action, don't waste time on climate deniers!
- Ensure messaging makes climate action accessible to everyone, rather than just the elites.

Focus on local issues

"The public expects the local government to address local issues!"

- Look at local climate risks and benefits, such as reduced flood risk or fire hazard rather than saying "this will help with climate change".
- Develop sustainable, long term goals, while keeping in mind the community.
- Find things everyone can relate to like local business support, better parks, reduced traffic congestion, enticing tourists.
- Plastics can be a good gateway conversation.
- Adaptation (preparing for climate impacts) is an easier entry point than mitigation (reducing future climate impacts), and at least it gets climate in the conversation. Folks who may not be keen on mitigation measures, will see the need for adaptation (to prevent the next flood, or forest fires, etc). Adaptation is not an option - it's a matter of preserving your community, preventing loss of life and property - if you can get sceptics on board on adaptation issues then start there and build towards mitigation.

Anticipate pushback: the questions councillors always get asked

Be well informed, anticipate pushback, and be ready with the answers.

"The easiest way to get your ideas shutdown is to have staff and other councillors point out flaws in your plan, and you don't know how to respond."

Below are some of the most common questions Council can ask and tips to keep in mind:

Why should we do this? Who will this help/benefit?

Try to outline the potential impacts of your project from as many angles as possible (economic, social, environmental, cultural, etc).

As an Albertan councillor put it, explain "how the city or the general public will benefit over the short and long term. Show how it can make the city more competitive as a great place to live and attract young talent."

To get a rounded idea of who this can help and what its impacts are, you can base your arguments on the consequences already measured in other cities (if there was a similar project), from the results academic studies, and from the testimonies on how your project might impact the people/businesses/groups in your community that you've talked to. You can also talk about your own experience and bring your own story to the table as supporting evidence (although, be sure to show community support as well).

As a side note, sometimes councillors are fearful of change or are perhaps even climate deniers. From this perspective, their easiest course of action may be to do nothing. Highlighting exactly how your project will benefit the community can help switch the conversation from a debate on climate change to an example of how you can build jobs in renewable energy or how it will help bring in long-term investments to retail businesses. Try to appeal to many different interests and arguments to cover your bases.

Do we have jurisdiction? What exactly do you want Council to do?

"How can we respond intelligently if we aren't clear about what is being asked?"

- BC Councillor

Make sure your ask fits into the capabilities and responsibilities of municipal government. Ask yourself if this is something municipal governments can solve or can lobby for.

If it is not totally clear whose jurisdiction it is in, you should have a compelling argument as to why the city should move forward with it or a precedent of another municipality doing so.

Have any other communities done this successfully? What problems did they encounter and how were these dealt with? How did they fund this?

"I am less interested in numbers than in good evidence backed up by an understanding of what council's constraints are. We can't do everything we want to do. If you can refer to other communities that have done it successfully, that gives me positive info that I can look into." - BC Councillor

Key is having details on how other communities have already done this successfully. You can find examples of all sorts of successful local climate actions in the [Climate Caucus Councillor's Handbook](#) to show that it can be done. Councils are inherently conservative because of tight budgets and busy agendas, so it is a lot easier if another town has done this before, and you can show exactly how it worked. Don't be shy: call program managers in these other towns to get information to help sway your council.

How much will it cost and will it require much staff time?

This question is often hard to answer as it depends on so many variables. If other communities have conducted a similar project, it might be helpful to reach out to the staff person who was in charge to ask for a rough estimate. At the proposal phase, councillors aren't expecting a fully costed proposal.

It can also be helpful to identify funders who might support your project. A good place to start is the [Federation of Canadian Municipalities](#).

Also, consider illustrating the project's cost avoidance, that is, how the project helps avoid having to spend in the future. Some might believe that doing nothing costs nothing, and this can show that isn't the case. This is particularly true with adaptation/risk reduction projects.

Aren't we already doing something about this? Didn't we already try this?

Do some research to see if your community is already working on this in some way so you can show how your proposal is not a duplication and even better, will enhance work already approved. Ask planning staff for help - they are going to have to do this work anyway if Council considers your idea.

Be aware whether a former councilor tried to implement this or a similar motion - address the roadblocks and know if the topic is already a bit tainted or perceived as "a failure"

Who won't like this, and how can you lessen negative impacts (e.g. on local businesses, residents)?

Once you know who might be opposed or who could suffer adverse effects, see if you can talk with them to find anything that would mitigate, make it better for them, reduce adverse outcomes. Sometimes listening and making small changes to your plan can make a big difference. If possible, try to do so before meeting with the Council to show that you've reached out to various community groups and found solutions for concerns.

Is this consistent with the Official Community Plan (OCP)/bylaws?

You will need to ask someone in the planning department to help you with this, but it is well worth checking. Many great ideas are shot down because they don't fit with the OCP. Finding ways that your project fits in with your community's approved plan is helpful in building a case. Exceptions are made to the plan all the time, but you need to be prepared to explain how it fits or why the plan should change. Planning staff know this document inside out and can help.

Cheat sheets

Our [Councillor's Handbook](#) has funding information and case studies in every chapter. For more specific topics, be prepared by reviewing these cheat sheets:

- [Green roof starter's guide for councillors](#)
- [Creating a food security council](#)
- [Supporting E-Mobility](#)
- [Commit to Zero Waste and a Circular Economy](#)
- [Implementing retrofit programs](#)

Knowledge is power

"As a new councillor I was continually being shut down by procedures I didn't understand."

Council procedures

Meetings can become the bane of your existence as a councillor. To keep your sense of humour over this: [Meetings Bloody Meetings!](#) [John Cleese Classic](#)

- Know the procedural bylaws which govern your city, whether these are Robert's Rules or something else. Knowing your procedures bylaw really well gives you a big advantage as you can speak the language of procedures rules.
 - If you don't understand these rules, others can easily shut you down.
 - Understand how to bring things forward, when to bring them forward, deferring, referring. For example you may be able to say "Let's refer to staff to find out what implementation and cost would look like" and avoid having your idea dismissed.
 - Keeping it alive is the most powerful thing you can do - if it doesn't die that day, you can bring it back. Referring for more information can really keep it going until it's ready to get approved by council.
 - You can bring back a motion if you can get another councillor on side, or the mayor can just bring it back. Even if you have a really bad night, you can potentially fix things.
 - Even if a motion dies, it sets things on the record, makes people question a little going forward.
- Also be sure to understand your local government act.
- Reach out to staff, past and present councillors to help you understand the procedures that your council uses - then you won't be caught unawares.

Development approval process

This will vary from province to province, so check out how it works in your community. A few things to be aware of:

- An established developer likely knows a lot more than a new councillor when it comes to municipal procedures.
- A lot of negotiation can take place before it ever comes to council.
- Developers may request zoning changes, exceptions (variances) to existing zoning as a way to get things done.
- By the time a development proposal gets to council, a lot of key decisions have already been made and there is a sense of urgency to approve - how can you get a heads up on what is under consideration?
- Where are there opportunities to make a project greener?
Some enticements to get projects to be greener can include:
 - fast tracking,
 - fee reduction,
 - floor area bonusing,
 - adjustments to parking minimums,
 - changes to height restrictions, other variances.

Key documents

- Local Government Act / Municipal Act / Community Charter
- Community bylaws/Official Community Plan (OCP)
- Strategic plan - in some communities this is a key document, but in others it may just collect dust so find out how important yours is and if it needs to be updated.
- Budget and annual budget review - this is VERY important as this impacts almost any initiative that involves spending.
 - If it isn't in the budget, it isn't happening even if it is in the OCP.
 - It is critically important to have the budget aligned with council priorities.
 - Choosing to do something that hadn't been planned in the budget can mean deleting something already planned and considered necessary.
 - There are seldom large contingency funds for things that may come up.
 - Budget review is done annually.
- Financial asset management plan - this is very important to building and maintaining a resilient community, yet it rarely includes natural assets.

How to make sure plans actually get put in place

"The majority of policies aren't actually being implemented."

Barriers to effective implementation

Councillors love to get a policy passed and then consider the job done, but in practice there are many barriers to implementation.

- Lack of council support - they passed it, but don't really care if it ever happens.
- Staff issues:
 - Overstretched staff - capacity can really be an issue, especially in smaller communities, and is worsened by aging infrastructure and unexpected crises.
 - Staff may lack the skills to implement or to track progress.
 - There may be a distinct lack of enthusiasm among staff due to these capacity issues or because of risk aversion, mixed messaging from council, or resistance to creative solutions as BAU is easier.
- The resolution itself fails to build in accountability. The typical lack of progress reporting and specificity in resolutions makes monitoring implementation challenging.
- The sheer number of resolutions can mean that everyone loses track. Councils often have too many plans (OCP, active transportation plan, retrofit plans, etc) and not enough accountability.
- Public burnout pushing for action or lack of buy-in from public so they don't push for implementation

Solutions and tips

COUNCIL SUPPORT

- Make sure most of your colleagues are in alignment and it isn't seen as your pet project.

STAFF SUPPORT

- Get staff input well before tabling a motion and ask them re barriers and how to revolve these - find out from them what is actually implementable.
- Some local governments, like Vancouver, have a policy that new resolutions be held for a week before going public. During that time they are reviewed by staff and commented on (re capacity, funding, potential changes, etc) and that feedback shared with council.
- Reassure them that this isn't so risky, show that others are taking riskier leadership roles, "don't worry, we aren't leading".
- Notice of motion is critical because you need to be making informed decisions. Put in a

notice of motion at least a week before it becomes public and get staff and councillor input. Advice may be contradictory, but you can work through that.

- Build good staff relations – [See staff relationships section](#).

BUILD CAPACITY

- Help build regional collaboration to share resources.
- Hiring an outside consultant can be a way of moving forward when staff are overstretched or lacking specialized expertise.
- Partner with community groups and First Nations to increase capacity and accountability.
- Support training for staff.
- Get your local MLA and MP on board and nail down which departments can help and how.
- Funding from higher levels of governments increases capacity and ensures accountability to funders so work gets done

BETTER RESOLUTIONS – IMPLEMENTATION IS MORE LIKELY IF:

- The resolution aligns with the strategic plan.
- If you have a climate policy or action plan, have a policy that climate change implications be a heading in every staff report (just like financial implications, legal implications, etc which appear on many staff reports).
- There is money allocated in the budget for this – you may need to add a budget line.
- There is legislative authority for the action – check first.
- Ensure the resolution is sufficiently detailed and includes:
 - specific actions
 - clear outcomes – measurable indicators/metrics of success – how will you know that the work is done successfully?
 - timelines, reporting requirements

STAFF ACCOUNTABILITY AFTER THE RESOLUTION PASSES

- Meet regularly with department heads and the city manager to check progress, learn about what is working and what isn't working, and how you could help. Be persistent in checking back with staff so they know you were serious about this work.
- Ask for management reports listing resolutions and status – at each meeting, monthly or quarterly.
- Ideally embed key targets into your performance review of your CAO or city manager.
- Require a line about climate implications on every staff report and have climate in the strategic plan.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

- Get a lot of public support ahead of time from diverse sectors – be able to demonstrate a broad constituency and public expectations that implementation is important.
- Better public engagement will mean the publican is more likely to hold council to account
- see [section on public engagement](#).
- See if the supporters you had among the public can also press for implementation and progress reports.
- Identify community champions who will push for implementation.
- A few councillors have resorted to doing their own personal blogs on the status of plans underway – blogging about each meeting and being frank rewarding what was great, what's working and what's not, highlighting what we need to do to be excellent.

THE BEST RESOURCES

for new councillors

Your Community

- Official Community Plan - OCP
- Procedural bylaws
- Zoning bylaws
- Strategic plan
- Climate plans

Climate Caucus

- [Councillor's Handbook](#) - contains case studies, sample bylaws, briefing notes - all you need to implement climate action in any of a number of key areas:
 - [Buildings](#)
 - [Zero Waste and Circular Economy](#)
 - [Nature Based Solutions](#)
 - [Transportation](#)
 - [Food Security](#)
 - [Rural and Smaller communities](#)
 - Motions library - join [Climate Caucus](#) to access
- [Youth Infiltration Manual](#)
- Connect directly with other climate friendly councillors:
 - Twice monthly Zoom calls with other locally elected officials
 - Our regional Caucus groups
 - Electeds-only Google Group list serve
 - For information on any of these, contact our Executive Director: alex@climatecaucus.ca

Climate Leaders Playbook

- [The Climate Leaders Playbook: Solutions for a Zero Carbon Community](#)
 - Resource with practical tools and levers for local government leaders working towards a zero-emission community

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

- Training
- Funding
- Networking

Provincial organizations (and local regional municipal organizations)

- BC: [UBCM](#)
- AB: [AUMA](#)
- AB: [RMA](#)
- SK: [SUMA](#)
- MB: [AMM](#)
- ON: [AMO](#)
- QC: [UMQ](#)
- NB: [UMNB](#)
- NS: [AMANS](#)
- PE: [FPEIM](#)
- NL: [MNL](#)
- YK: [AYC-YK](#)
- NT: [NWTAC](#)
- NU: [NAM](#)

Citizen & resident engagement tools

- [Bang the table](#)
 - Can look to [King Township](#) to see how it's working.
- [Tamarack Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Citizen Lab](#)
- [Placespeak](#)

Communications resources

- [Alberta Narratives Project](#)
- [Britain Talks Climate](#)
- [Communication for different political identities](#)
- [12 tools for communicating climate change more effectively](#)
- [Clean BC: best practices on communicating climate change](#)
- [SCARF model of communication and collaboration with others](#)

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