

Climate Crisis Langley Action Partners Candidate Meeting 2022
Petrina Arnason Responses

1. In July 2019 Township of Langley Council declared a climate emergency with the goal of highlighting accelerating climate change action. Then, in January 2021, Township implemented a Climate Action Strategy to tackle the causes of climate change and to adapt to its effects. The strategy has funding in Township's 2022 budget. In light of the fact that environmental sustainability is one of the Township's core values and that economic development and growth are affected by climate change, it is surprising to note that none of the mayoral candidates platforms includes anything about our climate emergency. Can you state your intentions about funding and updating the Townships' Climate Action Strategy?

In 2019 I was responsible for successfully bringing forward a Township of Langley Climate Emergency Declaration motion developed with the community.

I have always been extremely supportive of all environmental initiatives and hold a Masters in Environmental Studies degree as well as Law degree received at York University at a time when greenhouse gases were first being recognized as potential contributors to climate change.

I recognize that climate change is the most pressing exponential threat to humanity and that accelerated action needs to be taken in order to address this urgent need. I am therefore strongly in support of prioritizing all activities related to climate mitigation and reducing our GHG's and carbon footprint in order to meet the lower end of the safer limits to greenhouse gas emissions.

I have publicly stated on many occasions that I will make our Climate Action Strategy commitments a priority and would note that they are now embedded in Council's annual budget in alignment with the CAS. Given that there is no emphasis or focus on this critical issue at the mayoralty level, I would urge the community to support local government representatives who will make this a focus of expenditure as every dollar invested in climate mitigation will result in a 3 to 5 dollar saving relative to the economic costs wrought by fire, flooding, and infrastructure damage related to emerging climate anomalies.

2. Last year, climate disasters eg. (extreme heat, intense wildfires, flooding) resulted in the loss of human life, domestic animals and wildlife. We cannot mitigate weather patterns but we can adapt to the detrimental effects of climate change. What adaptation actions do you think should be undertaken to lessen the effects of the next climate disaster on Township residents?

I believe that there are a number of prescriptive actions that should be expedited in order to address the on-going detrimental effects of climate change. First and foremost, I believe that no development activities should be endorsed within any floodplains and that the Township should not grant any new development permits that contravene this principle. I believe we should also review opportunities for the Township to purchase flood prone lands in order to mitigate damages to built infrastructure that would otherwise be impacted by potential flooding. I also strongly believe that our diking system needs to be reviewed and that we need to cooperate regionally in order to effectively lobby for federal funding to enhance dike

design and height in order to protect public and private property from flooding due to increased incidences of atmospheric events.

I also believe that the Township should implement fire safe community design principles that will help to mitigate fire contagion based on the interface of rural and wooded areas with urban development across the community. This will help to ensure that residents are less vulnerable to increasing incidences of wildfires with potential ravine and hillside involvement.

And finally, it is critical that we reassess our building designs in order to enhance passive shading opportunities and that we upgrade our bylaws to ensure that air conditioning and other methods of cooling are integrated into all new buildings as soon as reasonably possible.

We need to protect the most vulnerable in our community and the heat dome experienced last year highlighted the need to more aggressively address the temperature-related needs of our most vulnerable, which often includes seniors and the young.

3. The Township's Climate Action Strategy does not include the views of Indigenous people on how to mitigate and adapt to climate change even though First Nations have managed this land long before European settlers set foot in the Pacific Northwest. Do you think that Indigenous people can offer a fresh perspective on how to manage climate disruptions and, if so, how would you engage First Nations to cooperate and share their knowledge with the Township?

I strongly support the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in decision making in and around climate mitigation and adaptation. As noted in the question, first nations have an intimate knowledge of the area based on their thousands of years of historical settlement here.

I am very aware of many communities who are actively engaging with local first nations in order to understand the principles of sustainability and stewardship that have evolved over the course of millennia. One prime historical example of this symbiosis is of the first nations who originally inhabited the Sumas Prairie area who co-evolved with the seasonal flooding and fluctuations of water levels arising from the original Sumas Lake in order to carry on agricultural and other activities harmonizing with the natural environment

As part of our commitment to truth and reconciliation, the Township is already actively engaged with our local first nations in a variety of projects and initiatives based on early engagement and dialogue aligned with our UNDRIP obligations.

As part of our proactive planning and ongoing activities related to our CAS, I believe that it is important that we engage with our first nation partners on a nation to nation basis so that we can continue to collaborate on initiatives to advance our environmental sustainability and to protect our collective interests in the area.

4. Retaining or planting a handful of unconnected trees during development does not compensate for the destruction of ecosystems for natural defenses against climate change. How will you mitigate the damage done by the continued urbanization of healthy, intact forests, wetlands and other habitats? That is, are you willing to respect wilderness' innate right to exist?

As one of the fastest growing communities in British Columbia, the Township must more proactively move towards standards that will protect and conserve a larger percentage of our existing ecosystems and local habitat. A number of studies including the Willoughby Habitat Status report, the seminal Westwater Research report, and many other documents and studies solicited by the Township have created a baseline of information regarding the ecological sensitivities of areas within the Township that are important to protect.

Unfortunately, many of these areas have been undermined and degraded due to increased development that is not sensitive to the undervalued ecological functions that need to be protected such as significant tree stands, wetlands, and other habitat.

I believe that more focussed attention and action need to be taken in order to understand the value of ecosystems and to monetize them with respect to budgetary conditions and trade-offs informed by the true economic value based on a nature-based solutions paradigm. Effectively, decision-making should not be made without the inclusion of the environment and any externalities need to be removed as we continue to grow in our understanding of the importance of our natural systems to our overall sustainability.

5. What is the most important pressing environmental issue that the Township of Langley is now facing and how would you solve it?

I believe that in addition to the climate crisis that the most important environmental issue in the Township of Langley is the rate of growth and the degree to which the Township has not integrated higher ecological standards and frameworks into our community planning as we continue to grow.

I would be in support of slowing the pace of growth and finding the resources necessary within our budgets to update our OCP and neighbourhood plans in order to be more reflective of exigencies arising from our multiplicity of environmental challenges.

6. In your opinion, actions from which of the eight priority areas of the Climate Action Strategy are more likely to help the Township reach its 2030 target of 45% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

I believe that we should accelerate activities in the areas of transportation and the built environment in order to reach our GHG goals.

This includes incentivization of the use of alternative modes of travel in order to reduce single use vehicle occupancy and trips. We also need to move more aggressively towards building up density and ridership in order to support transit options to include new technologies including electric buses and other fleet vehicles with reduced GHG emissions.

We also need to more aggressively moved towards a higher step code standard as every time we begin construction on a new build with a lower standard, we miss an opportunity to include GHG reductions based on the need to continually move towards further energy conservation and to reducing our dependency on fossil fuels for heating.

7. Urban development is growing apace in the Township of Langley. Communities that lack green infrastructure show a strong urban heat island effect in heatwaves. Extreme heat in urban areas are detrimental to the very young, the senior and vulnerable people in our communities. Low impact development, which emphasizes the use of green infrastructure, has not been applied in the Township, even though the Community Forest Management Strategy calls for developments to have a lesser impact on the environment. What are your intentions in using low impact development to grow urban areas?

I first raised the issue of low impact development within the discussions by TPAC and Diamondhead Consulting further to the CFMS. A LID-based strategy is included in the document in order to highlight the need to utilize specific methodologies in the development process to protect the existing environment.

I also took a course through SFU last year on green infrastructure which supports the applied use of existing ecosystems and habitat to take the place of some gray/engineered infrastructure in order to address surplus water and stormwater management.

Globally, low impact development practises are increasingly being utilized to deal with urban stormwater runoff and the deleterious effects of erosion, sedimentation, and pollution associated with overflow events.

The Township of Langley currently utilizes some green infrastructure initiatives including rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavement installation as mandated in a number of communities. However, we should be moving towards a systemic approach which includes the integration of these and other strategies in all of our built environments as an emerging best management practice.