

# The British Columbia Mayors' Climate Leadership Council: Five Years in Review and a work Plan for 2014 and beyond

## Introduction and Purpose

Local Government leaders in British Columbia have been at the forefront of efforts to reduce climate change and increase energy conservation and its environmental quality since the scientific case supporting these broad public policy concerns was first established in the 1990s.

Literally hundreds of energy conservation and GHG reduction projects have become operational through BC local government initiatives since that time adding up to significant improvements in these areas throughout the Province.

The British Columbia Mayors' Climate Leadership Council (BCMCLC) was established after the 2008 local government elections to assist the almost 50% of locally elected officials who were newly elected. This new leadership group provided a forum for British Columbia's locally elected officials to share experience and to engage and educate the provincial government in order to sustain energy conservation and clean generation efforts.

A compendium of background materials including Vision statements and education / engagement materials are included in an Appendix to this report. These additional reports reveal the successes to date and the large number of programs and funding sources available in BC for local governments to innovative if they are prepared to invest and take some risk in what typically are new areas of endeavour.

This report was prepared on behalf of the Board and staff of the Community Energy Association on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the creation of BCMCLC. The report is intended to take stock of the work to date and, based on the input of those involved, suggest ways for BCMCLC to revise the current Vision, adjust the approach to work as necessary better to achieve that Vision and to establish a work program for 2014 that is worthwhile, achievable and directed toward making climate and energy leadership a large and important part of both the local government and Provincial agenda this year and for those to come.

A series of interviews with present and past members of BCMCLC and involved CEA Board members and Staff formed the base research for this report. Hopefully all of those involved with BCMCLC, including elected officials and relevant staff, were aware of this review. Many were contacted and most generously provided responses to enquiries about the current and future direction of BCMCLC. Initial contacts with the current and past leadership group at the Community Energy Association (CEA) helped create a set of questions which formed the basis for another set of interviews with other current and past members of BCMCLC. Collectively, notes from these interviews provided the material for this report.

No attempt was made to achieve anything more than a commentary about the past and thoughts about the future of BCMCLC from all those who have been interviewed. Hopefully, those who contributed will see their thoughts reflected and amplified by this shared effort. With input from those involved, a proposal is made for BCMCLC work in 2014 to advocate for progressive and practical climate and energy initiatives within BC and to set the stage for a 2015-18 Strategic Direction for the organization.

(While preparing this paper, the Metro Mayor's Council released its Vision for Transportation a document that seeks to maximize the effectiveness of public expenditures on transit and transportation while minimizing green house gas emissions and energy use. It is another current example of the effectiveness of Mayors producing forward thinking and effective policy.)

## Overview of Findings

BCMCLC was established by a willing group of BC municipal political leaders for sustained and co-ordinated effort to increase energy conservation, to develop clean alternatives and, thereby, to reduce climatic damage. Building on good Federal programs in the 1990s through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, particularly Partners for Climate Protection and later the Province's Climate Action Charter (2007-8), a variety of projects and statements. Education and engagement are the major tools employed to date by BCMCLC.

The key findings are:

- BCMCLC has been and is effective, raising and maintaining climate change and energy conservation issues on the Provincial agenda with local and provincial politicians and staff and with the general public;
- BCMCLC's annual meetings, its communications and press releases and its time to time regional peer learning events and seminars, have and continue to be good vehicles for getting an important message out;
- BCMCLC is served by an effective staff who allocate a very small part of their time to encourage and support the membership;
- BCMCLC members believe that the annual breakfast meeting is particularly beneficial and has been attracting an increasing number of Provincial (within and without government) and municipal politicians
- BCMCLC could do more and would benefit from more regular meetings or, more practically, conference calls perhaps quarterly, to share information, discuss new ideas or emerging provincial policy (if any) and formulate messages;

A distilled comment -- no member made this specific recommendation -- BCMCLC would benefit from a dedicated staff resource that might be a .2 or .4 position and, recognizing that BCMCLC is a political organization, the staff assist might be best to work out of an agency like CEA or, more likely, or UBCM, which has a lobbying function.

## The Context and Mandate partners for Climate protection

In 1994, the Federal Government in partnership with the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) and many BC local governments began to study the ways they could respond positively to the implications or climate change in this energy rich and, historically, wasteful Province.

At the Provincial level and within the business community and popular press opposition soon emerged to elements of the Carbon Neutral Provincial legislation and programs particularly the carbon tax. Provincial Party platforms were being established to oppose these unpopular elements and to challenge policy making and program development in these areas.

After this introduction and through the next decade, a wide range of Private and Public Sector initiatives were introduced through BC Hydro, the BC Ministries and Private energy utilities.

The Province also recognized climate change as a major issue for local governments. Based on compelling international scientific research, the Province adopted strong policies obliging measured improvements in energy efficiency and carbon reduction. That research and those programs do not need to be reviewed here. It is worth noting though that Provincial policy at that time was at the forefront of legislation and programs in North America including the 2008 Climate Action Charter approach that provided the context for local government work on energy conservation and climate action. The mandate was embraced by Provincial agencies and most municipalities and regional districts. Some municipalities, though, largely ignored these new obligations.

Several policy oriented organizations devoted to towns and cities, like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities or the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, have existed for many years to advocate for local government and urban issues. FCM and UBCM work on a consensus model to a large extent though and have an aversion to moving faster than the majority of the membership.

Elsewhere, new local government organizations are springing up to share information and develop collective, local solutions. The internet allows an ever increasing flow of information with little regard for boundaries and divisions and with an increasing understanding of the commonality of many issues confronting local decision makers. Mayor's committees on large city issues and drug policies are becoming very effective internationally. International advocacy for local concerns, sharing best practises and enabling problem solving at a distance, as well as finding others devoted to a common cause at the local government level is very empowering.

BCMCLC has benefitted to some extent from these same features: Mayors sharing good ideas, promoting the best ones and having regular contact to reinforce and redirect as necessary.

## **Original Aspirations**

BCMCLC was established to provide leadership and education on climate action, particularly to the nearly 50% of locally elected officials who were newly elected in 2008. The BCMCLC aspired to do this by:

- Demonstrating visible leadership, thereby providing more space for other locally elected officials to act
- Educating locally elected officials on climate action including the background before the last local government elections
- Providing a clear, rational, non-partisan voice for climate action as required

BCMCLC has met at least once per year for a breakfast discussion at the UBCM annual conference since 2009 to establish priorities for the coming year.

## **2009-2014 -- A Success with Qualifications**

From its creation, BCMCLC has benefitted from a dedicated membership keen to employ well timed statements and pressure to encourage new energy initiatives and sustain those working well. The work of BCMCLC to support the misunderstood carbon tax during the run up to the 20xx Provincial election was the most prominent work undertaken to date and every year has included worthwhile events and initiatives. Some commentators thought that the level of activity was appropriate; most, though who had a comment in this area, felt that the level of Council activities was less than optimal.

Those surveyed reported that regional peer learning events and workshops have proven to be successful to stir interest in climate leadership amongst a broader elected audience; some of these same respondents also felt that more follow up is necessary to bring about change. Comments confirmed that the annual breakfast meeting with Provincial elected officials have been uniformly worthwhile and successful.

The effectiveness of BCMCLC has been limited though by three main factors:

- leadership and direction is provided by a very busy membership dispersed throughout the Province, who have a large number of other, sometimes more pressing, responsibilities;
- BCMCLC has a very limited budget (never more than \$15,000 per annum) and no assigned staff or administrative support;
- the activities of BCMCLC are often infrequent and initiative driven rather than regularized and based on a strategic direction.

## 2014 Workplan and 2015-18 Work Outline: Increasing Impact and Maintaining Relevance

**2014 Work Program:** The preceding review confirms that current BCMCLC membership is enthusiastic about the Council and optimistic about performing an increasingly important and influential role. In 2014:

1. It is proposed that BCMCLC propose to the CEA Board that 4 year funding be sought for the normalization of BCMCLC operations;
2. That conference calls be set up prior to UBCM, a breakfast meeting at UBCM based on the 2013 meeting and an additional conference call in Late November or early December to plan for 2015;
3. A news release timed to co-incident with the UBCM celebrating successes over the recent past and recommitting the BCMCLC membership to continuing efforts an

### In 2015:

1. a year of renewal for BCMCLC with the creation of a five year strategic direction for the Council with a work plan for the coming year and term.
2. the recruitment of new members as required for the Council in 2015;
3. the creation of a Secretariat for the Council (through CEA, UBCM or others); and
4. the establishment of a quarterly meeting schedule.

### Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that BCMCLC has an active group of engaged members who see value in the organization, who want to contribute to the Council, and who see room for the organization to improve and to become more effective through this process.

This brief interview based report is intended to provoke the discussions that may be necessary to put BCMCLC on a more solid footing for the coming years. A modest ongoing commitment is probably required by some established funding body to provide some organizational continuity for the Council.