

**Greenpeace Canada Deputation to the City of Toronto's Infrastructure and Environment Committee on
Item IE16.8: Fossil Fuel Advocacy Advertising on City Assets**

September 27, 2024

My name is Keith Stewart and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I am Greenpeace Canada's senior energy strategist and I also teach a course on energy policy at the University of Toronto. I would like to strongly support the motion that is before you on Fossil Fuel Advocacy Advertising on City Assets.

In the midst of a climate crisis, greenwashing is not a victim-less crime.

I started volunteering with the Toronto Environmental Alliance's climate caucus in 1994 and have worked full-time on climate policy and advocacy since 1999 with TEA, WWF-Canada and Greenpeace.

I have spent decades trying to counter misinformation coming out of the oil industry. The outright climate denial campaigns funded by oil companies like Exxon of the 1990s and 2000s that sought to cast doubt on the science to delay action were modeled on those of the tobacco industry. In many cases, they even used the same PR companies and spokespeople.

The campaigns by tobacco companies to misrepresent the science have had a huge cost in human life, suffering and health care costs. That is why we strictly limit tobacco advertising.

We should be doing the same with respect to fossil fuel companies.

The outright climate denial campaigns have morphed into what academics call a discourse of delay that includes advancing false solutions. The goal, however, remains the same: oil and gas companies want to block or delay action which would reduce demand for the product they are selling. Even though they know that the production and use of oil, coal and gas are the primary driver of the climate crisis whose impacts we've see all around us this year in the form of wildfires and floods driving people from their homes.

As part of countering this new era of misinformation, Greenpeace Canada launched a complaint last year with the Competition Bureau regarding the ad campaign by the Pathways Alliance. We detailed precisely where we thought they were being dishonest and it's an extremely strong case. The Competition Bureau investigation of our complaint is ongoing, but in the interim we have had new Competition Act legislation at the federal level that will clarify the rules around greenwashing.

The new rules are not popular with oil companies, who have launched a PR campaign to say that they are being silenced. But truth-in-advertising is enormously popular with Canadians. In an Angus Reid poll conducted last week for Greenpeace, 93% agreed with the statement "Companies should face penalties for making environmental claims that they can't prove are true."

The motion before you asks staff to report back on a policy to decline fossil fuel advocacy advertising on City assets unless it can meet two conditions. First, it must meet the terms of the new federal anti-greenwashing legislation. The Competition Bureau's public consultation on the guidance document which will detail how they will apply the new rules closes today, so those new rules will be fully in effect soon.

I think pre-screening is a good idea, so I don't have to launch legal proceedings to get bad ads taken down, which would be a waste of everyone's time and energy.

The motion also asks the City to decline fossil fuel advocacy advertising that is not consistent with TransformTO. This is an interesting question and one that deserves serious thought. We would be happy to provide resources to your staff as they develop advice for you.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.