

City of Toronto

Climate Advisory Group (CAG)

Summary Notes

Meeting #3: Sept 25, 2025

9:30am - 12:30pm

Present

Cara-Lynne Wade, Chris Ballard, Jeff Ranson, John Robinson, Lanrick Bennett Jr., Lindsay Walker, Lyn Adamson, Maria Constantinou, Marine Sanchez, Muzhi (Maggie) Chang, Richard Carlson, Rosemarie Powell, Sarah Buchanan, Shivani Chotalia, Zamani Ra, Jennifer Murphy, Lidia Ferreira, Andria Babbington, Jack Zhou, Kristen Evers, Christopher Warren, Jenn Vetter, Jenna Bentley, Joe Ogilvie

Regrets

Colin Guldemann, Joyce Mclean

City of Toronto Staff

Andrew Plunkett, Cecilia Fernandez, Kim Stemshorn, Sarah Gingrich, James Nowlan, Annemarie Baynton, Megan MacLean, Meegwun Logan, Jessica Chow, Rae-Anne Miller, Stephanie Mah, Noemie de Vuyst, Alice Xu, Sarah Rodrigues, Stephanie Gower, Andrea Bastien, Sophie Plottel

Facilitators

(BMG): David Buwalda, Nicholas Liznick

Agenda

1. Updates
2. Update on Intergovernmental Landscape
3. Furnace Upgrade Program
4. Update on December Report to Committee and City Council
 - a. TransformTO Net Zero Strategy Action Plan (2026-2030)
 - b. Building Emissions Performance Standards
 - c. Climate Resilience and Indigenous Engagement
5. Next Steps

Meeting Objectives

- Update on current Intergovernmental landscape
- Facilitate CAG input on Furnace Replacement Program
- Update on December reports to Committee and Council
- Facilitate CAG input on Resilience and Indigenous community outreach

1. Updates

- A. Announcement of Megan MacLean as the new City representative taking over from Andrew Plunkett as the Coordinator of the CAG. Andrew will continue to participate in his staff role with the Transportation working group.
- B. Two CAG Members requested a replacement from within their organization.
 - TDSB's Kristen Evers will be replaced by Jenn Vetter.
 - TEA's Sarah Buchanan will be replaced by How-Sen Chong in future meetings.
- C. Recruitment is underway to replace 2 CAG members that have decided not to renew along with 1 youth member, 3 new members total.
 - The City will share the recruitment posting with all members who may share broadly once live
- D. Maggie Chang and Lyn Adamson have agreed to renew as the CAG's co-chairs, representing the CAG on the CAG Secretariat.
- E. Working Groups will convene going forward upon request of the staff lead, the Secretariat, or the Working Group leads.
- F. The date selected for CAG#4 - Nov 28.
 - As part of the carbon accountability by-law the CAG needs to review the Net Zero Action plan before the Infrastructure & Environment Committee meeting on Dec. 4th.

Comments / Questions / Additions

- Maggie Chang can be included in the process of recruiting a youth member.
- Members highlighted the need for Toronto to provide input on the IESO's Integrated Regional Resource Plan to represent the City's interests in grid modernization and decarbonization efforts. The electrification working group should meet soon.

2. Update on Intergovernmental Landscape

Jamie MacDonald (Environment, Climate & Forestry – Policy & Data) provided an update on the evolving intergovernmental dynamics affecting the City of Toronto, focusing on climate policy, intergovernmental collaboration, and fiscal and policy uncertainty across federal and provincial levels.

Discussion Questions:

- What other intergovernmental developments or dynamics should the City be aware of?
- How best can the City work with or help reduce uncertainty?

Discussion Responses:

- Public and government priorities are shifting, especially regarding climate change, with the recent Listening to Toronto survey report indicating decreased prominence. There is ongoing uncertainty about future federal and provincial policies, particularly around climate and energy.
- Municipalities, especially Toronto, can seek true co-development with other government orders rather than only being consulted after decisions are made.
- Need for stable, predictable, and sufficient funding and policy frameworks. The province's energy-efficiency commitment (\$10 billion over 12 years) was cited as a rare positive example.

- Many factors affecting Toronto’s ability to act are outside its jurisdictional control. The City wants recognition of its scale and influence in federal/provincial decision-making.
- Fiscal limitations and government “bandwidth”—how only two or three priorities can be focused on at a time, crowding out other needs. Transit and housing dominate despite limited direct impact on GHG reductions.
- Suburban and peripheral municipalities are increasingly neutral or hostile towards aggressive climate policies, affecting regional collaboration.
- What does inclusive engagement really look like, and how can Toronto ensure early involvement rather than passive consultation?
- How will federal and provincial climate and energy policies materialize given recent political changes and fiscal constraints?
- When (and how) will promised funds—from the provincial or federal governments—translate into concrete programs for Toronto?
- How can Toronto align its climate agenda with top resident concerns like affordability and housing, given their crowding out of “climate” as a standalone issue?
- Are there other important intergovernmental developments or deadlines (e.g., IRRP release, federal budget) that the city needs to add to its tracking or advocacy efforts?

3. Furnace Upgrade Program

Sophie Plottel (Environment, Climate & Forestry - Residential Program Delivery) discussed the upcoming announcement of a Furnace Upgrade Program, which includes tailored energy coaching services for homeowners of low-rise buildings.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the most effective ways to promote the program? What messages will resonate? What channels should we use to promote?
- What might be the most impactful elements we can include as we expand this program? Should we prioritize support based on housing/heating types, populations (ex. Seniors, tenants, etc.), income based or something else?

Discussion Responses:

- Promotion strategies, emphasizing the need for proactive outreach and education, particularly for multi-residential units and low-income households. The key themes, common comments, and recurring questions across these sections center on program design gaps, opportunities for integrated service models, financing challenges, community-led engagement, and the need for inclusive, scalable approaches.
- Lack of personal engagement in outreach, relying too heavily on flyers and blitz campaigns.
- Fragmented process requiring homeowners to navigate contractors and financing on their own.
- Minimal post-installation audits, quality control, or troubleshooting support.
- Insufficient and underused financing mechanisms for high-cost retrofits.
- Strong interest in adopting centralized, managed-service “one-stop-shop” retrofit models seen internationally.
- Leveraging emergency repairs as strategic entry points for retrofits.
- Integrating process management, customer service, and contractor coordination to create seamless homeowner experiences.

- Use of local and culturally trusted organizations for outreach.
- Youth involvement as volunteer capacity and as a bridge for immigrant families.
- Event-based promotion through festivals, car-free days, and community hubs.
- Targeted tools like stickers on furnaces/water heaters and online ads where residents already seek repair services.
- Phased neighborhood pilots to refine processes before citywide rollout.
- Contractor network development to ensure capacity and fair “open book” pricing.
- Seasonal focus, e.g., prioritizing AC replacements during warmer months.
- Recognition that city property taxes alone can’t fund expansion.
- Emphasis on federal co-funding and integration with programs like the Canada Greener Homes Affordability Program.
- Interest in group-buy models to lower equipment/installation costs.
- Exploring on-bill financing to simplify repayments.
- Moving beyond heat pumps to include solar, resiliency measures, and solutions for multi-unit residential buildings.
- Designing targeted services for low/moderate-income households, tenants, seniors, and unhoused populations.
- Personal energy coaching to demystify retrofit options and connect homeowners to vetted contractors.
- Clarifying benefits (e.g., heat pumps also provide cooling).
- Strengthening the BetterHomesTO brand.
- Proactive outreach strategies rather than waiting for inbound requests.
- Value in neutral facilitation by Toronto Hydro (non-sales driven).
- Need for faster, simpler customer pathways from interest to installation.
- Public education gaps around retrofit technologies.

Additional Comments:

- The process is currently too fragmented, with homeowners left to self-navigate.
- Successful global models manage entire retrofit journeys under one umbrella.
- Emergency situations present high conversion opportunities for retrofits.
- Trusted local organizations can reach diverse communities more effectively than city-wide campaigns.
- Financing is a major barrier; cost reduction strategies like group buys could help.
- Youth outreach and community ambassadors improve penetration into hard-to-reach demographics.
- Customer trust grows when advice comes from non-commercial actors (e.g., Toronto Hydro coaches).
- How can the City create a truly integrated “one-stop-shop” retrofit service?
- What outreach approaches will ensure program adoption in underserved or diverse communities?
- How can financing options be expanded and better communicated to those most in need?

- How can emergency repair moments be leveraged effectively without adding administrative delays?
- What strategies ensure scalability while maintaining equity and inclusion?
- How should the program name and branding evolve to maximize recognition and trust?
- Which technologies and populations should take priority in future expansions?
- How to maintain contractor quality and fair pricing during rapid scale-up?

4. Update on December Reports to Committee and City Council

Update on TransformTO Net Zero Strategy Action Plan (2026-2030)

Sarah Gingrich (Environment, Climate & Forestry – Policy & Data) presented on the City's progress toward net-zero GHG emissions, with key messages emphasizing community-wide efforts, the importance of the five-year action plan, and the need to address significant emission gaps. The City's corporate actions, including building emission performance standards and transportation initiatives, were discussed, along with the inclusion of new critical steps like waste and wastewater management. The timeline for the Net Zero Strategy Action Plan was outlined, with key dates set for December, and the BEPS report was mentioned as being finalized for December release, with further discussions planned on technical aspects and affordability.

No Discussion Questions were presented.

Building Emissions Performance Standards (BEPS)

James Nowlan (Executive Director, Environment, Climate & Forestry) provided an update on BEPS. In light of the new Council direction provided in July 2025, the BEPS team has undertaken discussions to assess how BEPS can more effectively respond to affordability and economic competitiveness considerations within the current political and economic context. One of the key topics of those conversations is around multi-unit residential buildings and the challenges with affordability for tenants. Given the importance of conducting these discussions the City is carefully considering the most appropriate strategic approach for BEPS to support successful implementation and broad alignment among stakeholders. Public consultation events have not yet been advanced, but there are plans to engage the advisory groups on the technical limits ahead of the Council report in December.

No Discussion Questions were presented.

Climate Resilience and Indigenous Engagement

Climate Resilience

Stephanie Gower (Environment, Climate & Forestry – Resilience) provided an update on the climate resilience portfolio, highlighting recent work on updating climate projections and conducting a citywide risk assessment.

Discussion Question:

How would you prefer to learn about Indigenous perspectives in climate work and what ways would you like to cross-pollinate, learn, and engage with Indigenous-led activities focused on working alongside the City on climate?

Discussion Responses:

- Ongoing efforts need to engage Indigenous communities, emphasizing the importance of sustained dialogue, moving beyond tokenistic consultation, and ensuring Indigenous perspectives are represented from the outset of City climate initiatives.
- There is an expressed need to shift the language from technical climate change terminology to more accessible and locally meaningful concepts, such as "Mother Earth is sick" and emphasizing land and water stewardship, which resonate better with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike.
- Questions arise regarding whether the City's engagement efforts take a distinctions-based approach, recognizing the unique needs and identities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, rather than treating Indigenous communities as a monolithic group.
- There are gaps in current processes and the need for deeper, ongoing relationships both with treaty partners and grassroots community members. Building trust and capacity for long-term partnerships are consistently emphasized as prerequisites for effective collaboration.
- Need to understand the value of decolonizing climate and engagement conversations, not just for Indigenous communities but for all groups, including newcomers and equity-deserving populations. There is interest in building coalitions and more inclusive forums for open dialogue and shared learning.

Common Questions

- What framework can ensure Indigenous voices are present without fostering tokenism or extraction from communities?
- How can strength-based asset mapping shift the focus from risk and vulnerability toward momentum and capacity in neighborhoods?
- Is there an opportunity for Toronto to adopt a distinctions-based engagement model for Indigenous communities?
- What approaches or structures would create safe, sustained dialogue and reciprocity between Indigenous leaders and city officials?
- How can climate conversations be reframed using language and values meaningful to diverse community members beyond technical terms?
- What practical activities or coalition-building sessions could advance these goals of deeper engagement and learning?

5. Next Steps

- Q4 meeting set for 9:30-12:30 on Friday, November 28th, Montreal Boardroom at Union Station. Special request for members to attend in-person and stay for an end-of-year luncheon.
- CAG Secretariat:
 - Consider bringing Working Groups together, esp. those advising the intergovernmental, electrification, buildings and resilience activities discussed in this meeting.
 - Share info with CAG members related to Toronto Climate Week events
 - Summarize and share meeting notes from Q3 meeting.

End Summary Notes