

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

### 6. Reviewing Decision that Reversed Vancouver's Ban on Climate and Health-Harming Gas in New Homes

Submitted by: Councillor Carr

#### WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver has been a leader in responding to the climate emergency with plans and policies to reduce the city's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, including approving a Zero Emissions Building Plan that with a unanimous vote of council on July 13, 2016 that adopted the target "to achieve zero emissions for all new buildings by 2030 including intermediary time-stepped GHG emission and thermal energy demand targets as described in the plan (see [Policy Report dated July 5, 2016](#) ). Appendix B of that report noted the considerable expert advice obtained in the development of the policy, including representatives from BC Hydro, FortisBC, the Urban Development Institute BC, Greater Vancouver Homebuilders Association, BC Construction Association, Architectural Institute of BC, BC Government ministries, non-governmental associations, academic institutions, and building sector companies and consultants;
2. On July 23, 2024, city staff presented a report, *Vancouver's Next Climate Plans*, to develop the City's 2026-2030 climate action plans and a financial framework to reduce carbon pollution by 50 percent by 2030 and prepare for the impacts of climate change by increasing Vancouver's readiness and resilience. Without any advance notification to the public, media or Council as a whole, Councillor Montague tabled an amendment to this report to change the city's long-standing policy direction and revert to allowing new buildings to hook up to gas for space and water heating, as follows:

*FURTHER THAT, in providing greater clarity about the City's role in climate action, and to support other Council priorities such as housing affordability, Council resolves to allow natural gas for heating and hot water for new construction, including homes that fall within the Missing Middle Housing Framework given the rapid decarbonization of BC's gas system such as provincially-stated RNG percentage targets (15% by 2030), hydrogen gas blends, and the adoption of new technologies that would allow for greater choice and more resilient pathways to achieving the City's desired emission reduction and decarbonization outcomes;*

3. Councillor Montague's rationale for the motion included stating that "people want to have the choice on how to cook their food", intimating that they don't have that choice under current policy which is incorrect, and that the intent is to make Vancouver more affordable, intimating that current policy is making Vancouver less affordable (see: [Vancouver reverses ban on natural gas heating in new homes](#)).

Inaccurate information presented as part of the rationale for the motion could have negatively swayed the vote of fellow Councillors;

4. On October 4, 2024, Vancouver's Mayor and Council received a letter from 39 of Vancouver's Building Industry Leaders, that stated:

*We understand that some of you have concerns about the GHG emissions limits for new buildings in Vancouver. In your July 23rd council meeting, some of you expressed the belief that these limits, in effect since January 1, 2022, for detached homes and townhouses and July 1, 2023, for some of the larger multi-family buildings, are contributing to Vancouver's housing crisis. This belief was the basis which prompted some of you to vote in favour of increasing the GHG emissions limits for new buildings.*

*We are asking you to reconsider this decision.*

*While Vancouver is clearly suffering from a housing affordability crisis, this is not the result of the current emissions limits for new buildings. As established by [ZEBx in 2021](#) and corroborated by [BC Housing](#) a few months ago, near-zero emissions (all-electric) and energy-efficient buildings are being built throughout B.C., including in Vancouver, for a wide variety of square foot costs. Some of these high-performance buildings are being built for less than the average cost. The two studies cover a wide range of housing types and most of the buildings in the studies meet the top step of the Energy and Zero Carbon Step Code.*

*The construction or development costs and schedule are determined by far more dominant factors, such as financing terms and rates, permitting times and fees, development cost charges, labour, material and equipment cost and availability, land values, and a variety of other factors that render the financial impact of emissions limits insignificant in most cases. The cost to rent or purchase a home is dictated by the market (supply vs. demand) and not by construction or development costs...*

*Reversing a requirement that has been in place for a year or two contributes to market uncertainty and this is bad for business. It risks erasing the progress that the local building community has made in the last few years and undermines our position as national leaders in high-performance buildings;*

5. On October 10 Metro Vancouver's Zero Emissions Innovation Centre (ZEIC) released the results of a survey responded to by 109 members of BC's building industry. The media release stated: (see <https://zeic.ca/bc-building-industry-members-support-climate-policies-for-new-construction/>);

*The survey results show a strong consensus that industry is either already meeting or will be able to meet provincial and City of Vancouver building energy regulations. The results also show that these regulations are not materially driving increased construction costs or slowing down housing development. Industry sees these policies as a competitive advantage, and that proposals to weaken regulations could lead to higher emissions, regulatory uncertainty, less healthy buildings, and higher operational costs. Respondents said they see considerable future demand for climate-friendly, energy-efficient new homes.*

6. An article published October 8, 2024, in the *Vancouver Sun* states that Councillor Montague's July 23 motion "was the culmination of behind-the-scenes discussions that included Mayor Ken Sim's senior adviser, David Grewal, who is director of two private natural gas companies". This information was not provided to Council nor the public at the time of the July 23 decision (see <https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/columnists/questions-role-vancouver-mayors-adviser-controversial-natural-gas-vote>);
7. The vote on Councillor Montague's July 23 motion was delayed for 15 minutes (from 6:59 to 7:14 pm) in order to contact the Mayor, who was on a leave of absence and had not been participating in the meeting, to call in from Europe to cast the deciding vote in favour;
8. Council's Code of Conduct states that a member of Council must uphold certain standards and values (see [https://vancouver.ca/docs/council/12886\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_Bylaw.pdf](https://vancouver.ca/docs/council/12886_Code_of_Conduct_Bylaw.pdf)) including:
  - a. fairness: a member must consider all issues consistently and fairly, and in light of all relevant facts, opinions and analysis of which a member should be reasonably aware; and
  - b. leadership in the public interest: a member must act in the best interests of the city as a whole, and without regard to the member's personal interests.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT Council direct staff to review the process related to Councillor Montague's amendment to the July 23, 2024, staff report *Vancouver's Next Climate Plans* as an example of decision-making process that can be improved upon and report back to Council with recommendations regarding amending the Procedure By-law or other policies or by-laws to improve democratic processes and practices related to Council amendments and motions to:

- a. Provide opportunities for a member of Council to:
  - i. Challenge a motion or amendment under the *Code of Conduct Part 2 (b) fairness - a member must consider all issues consistently and fairly, and in light of all relevant facts, opinions and analysis of which a member should be reasonably aware* on the basis of misinformation or insufficient information and require that staff provide more fulsome and accurate information to Council prior to a vote on the matter,
  - ii. *Postpone a motion or amendment that significantly changes or reverses city policy or bylaws that have been established through robust public consultation and input without any opportunity for staff or the public to comment or provide input, in order to require and provide sufficient time for the public to be informed, consulted and provided the opportunity to provide input;*

- b. Require that a member of Council publicly divulge sources of information and collaboration regarding their motions or amendments, including with the Mayor's office staff, in accordance with the *Code of Conduct* Section 2.(g) transparency – a member must conduct their duties in an open and transparent manner, except where this conflicts with their duties to protect confidential information; and
- c. Require, similar to the requirement for a Public Hearing, that a Council member, if absent for a part or all of the proceedings, public input and Council debate, must have reviewed the proceedings before being able to vote on the matter.

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