

Frequently Asked Questions About Vancouver's Fossil Fuel and Climate Policy Efforts

This FAQ addresses basic questions about recent efforts by the City of Vancouver, WA, to address climate-changing pollution that impacts Vancouver neighborhoods, particularly those nearest to the Port of Vancouver and other transportation corridors. According to Washington's Environmental Health Disparities Map, these communities are often disproportionately impacted by the climate-changing pollution and health-harming smog, water pollution, and safety hazards that go with major fossil fuel facilities.

What is proposed?

In 2022, Vancouver will move forward with addressing climate change both through a Climate Action Plan and a permanent ordinance to prohibit the construction of new—and the expansion of existing—large-scale fossil fuel terminals, such as rail terminals that bring in unit trains of coal, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and liquefied petroleum or propane gas (LPG).

City Council members have expressed interest and strong support for aggressive climate action, and they have expressed a strong aversion to seeing Vancouver rehash the 5-year contentious debate that led the City, the County, and Washington state to reject the largest oil-by-rail terminal proposed in the U.S.—the Tesoro-Savage proposal.

Since 2018, the City, the Port, and the community have tried to move forward with concrete climate actions that can avert future fossil fuel train proposals, while also creating momentum for health-improving local changes that draw down our dependence on fossil fuels. An equitable fossil fuel terminal ordinance will play a major role in this effort, as will vehicle and building electrification.

What would the City's proposed ordinance prohibiting new or expanded large-scale fossil fuel facilities accomplish?

On December 6, 2021, the [Vancouver City Council extended its moratorium on large-scale fossil fuel facilities](#). The City Council's unanimous decision allows staff additional time to conduct a careful analysis of the impacts of a permanent ordinance to address large-scale fossil fuel facilities.

As currently drafted, the permanent ordinance would:

- Prohibit new large-scale fossil fuel facilities, typically those with the capacity to handle or store more than 2 million gallons of liquid fossil fuel, or an equivalent amount of gaseous fossil fuel. These types of facilities can be fed by unit trains of volatile fuels, are often located on liquefiable soils, and pose major health, safety, and spill risks during and after a seismic event.
- Prohibit the expansion of existing large-scale fossil fuel facilities.
- Existing facilities are allowed to operate as they do currently, and they are free to transition their operations to cleaner fuels. (Certain critical fuel supplies - aviation and marine fuels, for instance - are exempted under the current draft ordinance.)

- Prohibit projects like large-scale LNG or LPG terminals, which can ship unit trains of dangerous fuels through a long stretch of Vancouver.
- Enable an orderly transition away from dirty fossil fuels. Health and safety concerns about the risks associated with fossil fuel trains—including spills, water pollution, and air pollution—featured prominently in the City Council’s reasoning for the ordinance.

Community members have organized in favor of this policy for years. The Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE)—founded after the cancellation of the Tesoro-Savage oil train terminal in 2018—helped to secure a commitment from the Port of Vancouver to not pursue bulk fossil fuel facilities like an oil-by-rail, LPG, or LNG terminal. The City Council has an opportunity to make this a long-term, legally enforceable, binding City policy.

What is the City doing already to enact climate action?

According to [The Columbian](#), in August 2021, City Council urged their staff to begin identifying steps that could be taken in the interim while the Climate Action Plan was still being developed. These “early action” options involved ideas about which the Council agreed there was general consensus, and near-term opportunities to make progress towards the City’s stated climate and equity goals. The initial, early-action steps of Vancouver’s Climate Action Plan involve:

- Investing in 100 percent renewable energy for municipal buildings this year;
- Subsidizing home weatherization and energy-efficiency retrofits for low-income households;
- Developing citywide electric vehicle charging infrastructure; and
- Establishing a municipal energy fund

These actions make sense. City staff are moving towards implementing these early action components, with strong community support so far.

As we discuss further below, we are concerned that other aspects of the early action plan, not yet being pursued, leave room for fracked gas energy to increase in homes and businesses. Sightline Institute has identified the “smoke and mirrors” approach to climate action promoted by the fracked gas industry, and the gas industry is advocating for Vancouver to commit new construction to gas.

What would the City’s Climate Action Plan accomplish?

Vancouver is changing quickly, and this offers an important opportunity to avoid locking in fossil fuel (like fracked gas) in the City’s future, in its buildings and its energy sources for power and transportation. Vancouver community members have pushed the City for years to increase its practical actions and planning for climate resilience, public safety, and a transition away from volatile fossil fuels. In one City Council meeting after another, community advocates coordinating with the Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE) have urged the City Council to commit to more immediate action and firm safeguards against more fossil fuel development.

Several City Council members have expressed concern and alarm about recent extreme weather and climate change-induced events, including the staggering heat event in June 2021, when temperatures in the area topped 115 degrees. To build the options for its Climate Action Plan, the City hired a consultant in 2020, and

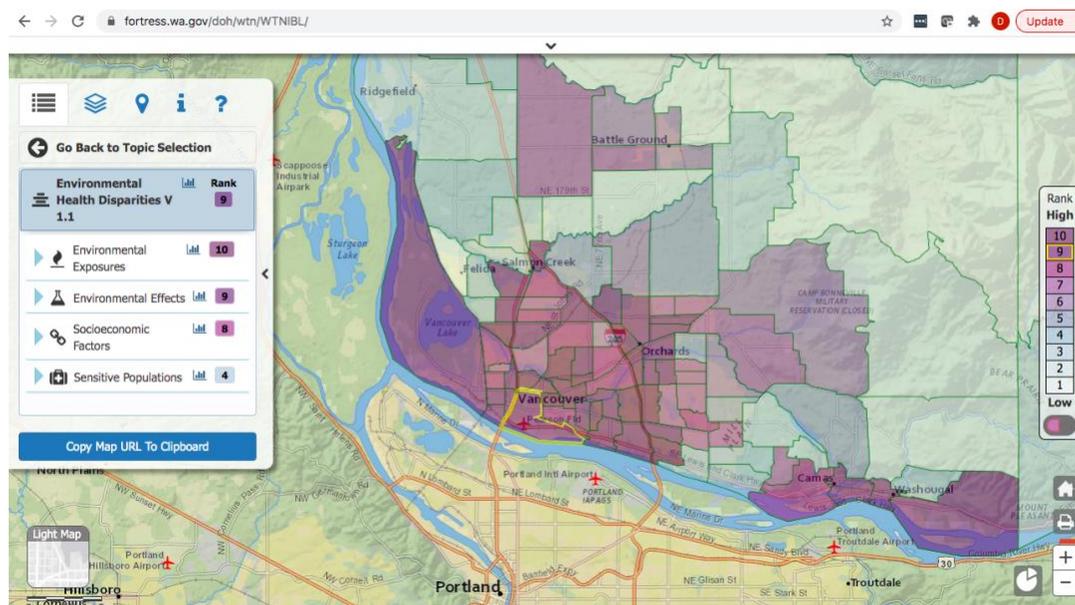
engaged in community conversations to understand the issues that should be addressed most urgently through Vancouver’s Climate Action Plan. (You can learn more about community members’ suggestions for the Climate Action Plan on Vancouver’s [“Be Heard Vancouver” website.](#)) The City is open to hearing more from the community, and City Council meetings provide a good forum to offer information or ideas to the Council.

Given a choice of how ambitiously to approach the Climate Action Plan the City Council urged staff during its July 2021 meeting to be as action-oriented, practical, and aggressive as possible in steering Vancouver towards a healthier environment, a more resilient community, and a sharp reduction in reliance on fossil fuels. City staff initially called this approach “Leading Edge,” and the City Council urged them to move towards implementing certain actions very quickly.

Specific action items the City is considering incorporating into its “Leading Edge” Climate Action Plan include:

- Promoting cleaner forms of transportation, including electric vehicles. The plan would also encourage new buildings to adhere to high energy efficiency standards to reduce energy burdens.
- Prioritizing equity by focusing on communities most impacted by pollution and weather extremes in Vancouver, through targeted weatherization, heat pump projects, and other measures to reduce energy and pollution burdens on low-income, BIPOC, and otherwise marginalized communities.

The Washington Department of Health’s Environmental Health Disparities Map makes a compelling argument for aggressive action to reduce pollution and energy burdens on those with fewer resources to address these problems. In the screenshot below, you can see that many Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color (BIPOC) communities within Vancouver face an Environmental Health Disparities ranking at the very top of the Washington Department of Health’s index.

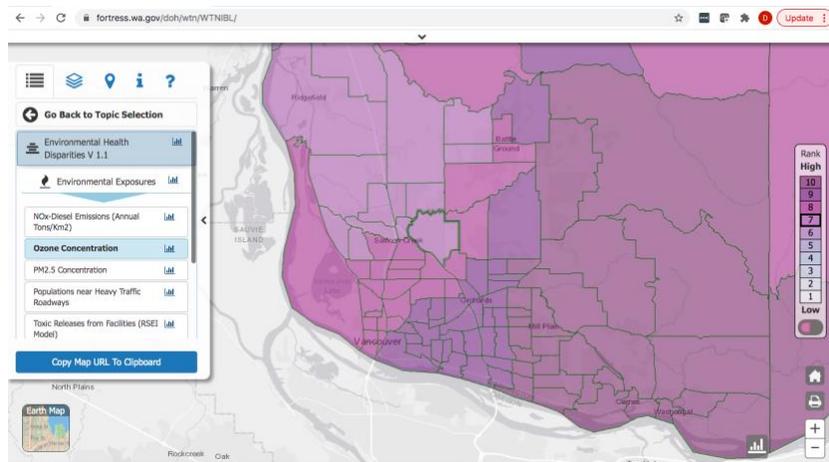


Source: Environmental Health Disparities Map. Accessed December 2021. <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/wtn/WTNIBL/>

What are issues to watch as the Climate Action Plan develops?

- **The City must maintain and enhance its focus on equity by addressing the environmental health disparities that come from fossil fuel pollution in the City.** The Climate Action Plan should prioritize actions that address the harms of unhealthy pollution levels in BIPOC communities. BIPOC and lower-

income communities face energy and pollution burdens more highly in Vancouver than in many locations, according to data from the Washington Department of Health.



Source: Environmental Health Disparities Map. Accessed December 2021. <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/wtn/WTNIBL/>

The Environmental Health Disparities map shows that most of Vancouver rates between 7-10 on a scale of 10 when it comes to ozone pollution, which forms as a product of nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and sunlight. Fossil fuel burning emits smog-forming pollution. For example, fracked gas combustion contributes significantly to volatile organic compounds and other air pollution in the Vancouver area, and vehicular traffic plays a major role also. Vancouver must step up to address the major impact of pollution on its communities.

- **Keep an eye on false solutions that prop up fracked gas use.** The current version of the City’s early action plan leaves the door open to fracked fuels continuing to increase in homes, businesses, and possibly other areas of the economy.
 - Products such as “grey hydrogen” (made from fracked gas) or “renewable natural gas” also known as RNG, will impede rather than aid the City’s goals. RNG is often used to justify continued use of fracked gas, and it distracts from the core issue of finding ways to help local residents and communities improve both their outdoor and indoor health through a reduction in the burning of fossil fuels. For “Leading Edge,” the plan should instead focus on new buildings relying on electric rather than gas-powered energy sources.
 - If the City Council is going to be as aggressive as they hope to be, it will have to avoid distractions like RNG. Capturing waste methane from municipal facilities is a good idea, but it should not impede the effort to reduce the use of fracked fuels as quickly as possible, as equitably as possible. NW Natural and the fracked gas industry’s relentless promotion of RNG wildly overstates its ability to actually displace fracked gas, which will be the majority of gas in our pipelines for the foreseeable future. Adding a little bit of RNG into a stream of fracked gas does not make the system “green.” In fact, it could lead to more fracked gas use and hinder a more effective transition to electrifying homes and buildings, with assistance earmarked or dedicated? for low-income ratepayers.
 - Vancouver should avoid policies and programs that promote new gas pipes, which will likely diminish in use and increase in cost, as more new buildings opt for electric rather than gas energy. (To learn more about the false promise of RNG, check out the Resources section below.)

What can I do to learn more and to take action?

Community action has driven Vancouver's environmental progress from the very beginning. The City Council's enthusiasm for the issue speaks to both the success of community pressure, as well as the severity of the climate crisis. Throughout 2022, there will be a number of ways to engage in Vancouver's processes:

1. **Show the City Council that you support a permanent prohibition on new and expanded, large-scale bulk fossil fuel projects.** When the time comes, we will all need to testify in support of a strong fossil fuel ordinance. We expect hearings and a vote in 2022.

***Attend City Council meetings!** Speak in support of strong climate action and the City's policy to prohibit all new or expanded large-scale fossil fuel facilities, a policy defined carefully to protect the health and safety of Vancouver residents. You can find more information on how to speak to the Vancouver City Council at <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/citycouncil/page/guidelines-community-testimony>*

2. **Comment on the City's environmental review of the large-scale fossil fuel ordinance in early 2022.** The City of Vancouver will soon develop an environmental analysis under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) to inform its prohibition on new or expanded, large-scale fossil fuel facilities.

To weigh in on this, check in with the City Council's agendas:

<https://www.cityofvancouver.us/citycouncil/page/city-council-meeting-agendas-and-minutes>

3. **Support the development of an equitable, effective Climate Action Plan (more to come on how to take action on this issue).**
4. **Share this FAQ** and help others understand the issues!

For Questions about this FAQ, contact Dan Serres, Conservation Director, dan@columbiariverkeeper.org.

Resources

1. Washington Department of Health. December 2021. Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map. <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/wtn/WTNIBL/>
2. Sightline Institute. April 2021. "The Smoke and Mirrors Defense of RNG." <https://www.sightline.org/2021/04/19/the-smoke-and-mirrors-defense-of-rng/>
3. Sightline Institute. March 2021. "The Four Fatal Flaws of RNG." <https://www.sightline.org/2021/03/09/the-four-fatal-flaws-of-renewable-natural-gas/>
4. Natural Resources Defense Council. 2020. "RNG" A Pipe Dream or a Climate Solution?" <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/pipe-dream-or-climate-solution>