

HOW DO TORONTO'S NEW CLIMATE-RELATED POLICIES STACK UP?

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Amid global climate impacts including B.C.'s heat wave that killed more than 800 people, Toronto is accelerating parts of its plan to help slow and eventually stop the unfolding catastrophe.

City council's recent meeting saw approval of a host of climate-related policies — some with teeth, others more symbolic — including a requirement for developers to make new buildings significantly less polluting than those constructed now.

Sarah Buchanan, campaigns director for Toronto Environmental Alliance, was struck that councillors are now trying to alleviate immediate impacts of extreme weather along with steps to reduce warming by going carbon neutral by 2050.

Councillor-initiated motions included efforts to protect highrise renters from scorching heat and homeowners from basement flooding triggered by increasingly intense rainfall overwhelming the sewer system and invading basements.

"Council is starting to connect the climate dots here," Buchanan says, "by backing some big actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions while, at the same time, dealing with issues like flooding in Black Creek and stormwater runoff."

She applauded updates to the ambitious long-term plan, but noted many actions, including home retrofits that will cost billions of dollars, remain unfunded.

"We're starting to see more ambition and that's great, but when you boil it down a lot of these big

plans need funding to happen on the massive scale required, so we'll be watching as always at (city) budget time," Buchanan said.

Bryan Purcell, vice-president of regional climate agency TAF, says council's moves "are a step in the right direction toward strengthening climate policies and programs — but still fall short of responding to the severity of the climate emergency."

"We hope to see more and stronger action by the end of this year when we're expecting staff to report back with an updated overall climate plan," he says.

"Toronto is such a significant part of Ontario, and of Canada, that if we fall behind on climate, it puts at risk provincial and national targets toward net zero (carbon). It also risks Toronto being left be-

hind in the 21st-century economy."

We asked Buchanan and Purcell to parse some of the city initiatives:

- Toronto Green Standard update: "It takes effect for all new developments starting in April 2022 and requires about 25-per-cent better carbon emission performance compared to the current standard in Toronto," Purcell says.

"It's a very significant step forward in an area where Toronto is a leader in Canada, along with Vancouver." Tools builders can use to reduce emissions including green roofs, electric-vehicle parking, heat pumps and extra-efficient windows.

Buchanan calls the plan "ambitious but also the bare minimum of what we need to do," to have a shot at achieving the city's reduction targets for 2030

and 2050.

- Net zero existing building strategy: A multi-step road map to ensure virtually all Toronto buildings, including single-family homes, become energy efficient includes voluntary emission targets that later become mandatory. That requires retrofits — and pricey programs to subsidize them. Purcell says: "There are about a half-million homes — to get to net zero by 2050 we need to make a lot of progress by 2030. It's a really important step but the city has a lot of work exploring its authority (to enact it) under provincial legislation and crafting a bylaw."

Buchanan says her alliance supports the strategy but also wants a "holistic" approach toward buildings that addresses their affordability, heat wave impacts and waste man-

agement along with their carbon footprint.

- Basement flooding, overheated highrises and stormwater fee motions: All are attempts to alleviate climate change impacts on Torontonians. Coun. Mike Layton's stormwater motion asks city staff to report back on establishing a fee, paid by property owners based on their amount of hard surfaces including large parking lots. The more hard surfaces, the more runoff and the more flooding.

"For me," Buchanan says, council thwarting past attempts at establishing such a fee "is an example of ambition falling short when it's put to the test." Significant revenues from stormwater fees, with owners of big lots including shopping malls paying the most, could help fund a lot of anti-flooding efforts, she says.

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