

Local Choices, Lasting Impact: Rethinking Global Climate Programs in Canadian Municipalities



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Introduction

The motion for Canadian municipalities to join the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program invites a thorough re-examination. Environmental protection is essential; however, the PCP program introduces various challenges and considerations that require careful scrutiny to ensure that participation aligns with the best interests of Canadian municipalities and their residents.

Purpose

This report recommends that Canadian municipalities reconsider their participation in the PCP program due to significant concerns surrounding data collection and privacy, financial burden, local autonomy, and impacts on the housing market, agriculture, and construction industries. The recommendation emphasizes the importance of prioritizing energy security and creating community-driven environmental stewardship strategies tailored to local values, priorities, and financial capacities.

Historical and Ideological Roots of the PCP Program

The historical and ideological context of the PCP program ties together its origins and its alignment with global sustainability initiatives. Understanding the foundational concepts that drive this program is essential to frame key concerns, particularly around issues of local autonomy, land use, and the influence of global frameworks on municipal governance in Canada.

Overview and Adoption of the PCP Program

The PCP program is a notable initiative within the United Nations framework, designed to address climate change at the municipal level in Canada. Administered by the FCM, with funding from ICLEI Canada and the Government of Canada, this program has been adopted by over 520 municipalities, impacting 70% of the Canadian population. Despite its voluntary nature and the option for municipalities to withdraw, the program's liability waiver by the FCM and the Government of Canada raises concerns about financial, legal, and operational accountability.

The Evolution of ICLEI and the Launch of the PCP Program

ICLEI, the organization behind the PCP program, was established during the 1990 World Congress of Local Governments for a Sustainable Future. In collaboration with the FCM, ICLEI contributed to drafting Agenda 21 for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), laying the groundwork for the PCP program. Following the

1992 Earth Summit, the FCM and ICLEI officially launched the PCP Program and, in 1994, released the *FCM Municipal Primer on UNCED*.

The Concept of Sustainable Development and Land Use Control

The term “sustainable development” originated with the 1976 Brundtland Commission, where the United Nations articulated its official stance on land use, emphasizing that land should not be treated as an ordinary asset under individual control. This philosophy forms the foundation of many sustainable development policies, including those promoted by ICLEI and the FCM, often advocating for centralized land use control to meet broader environmental and economic goals.

Global and Local Connections to the PCP Program

The timing and connections between these initiatives underscore the deep ties between the PCP program and the broader international environmental agenda. While aligning local municipalities with global sustainability goals, the PCP program also raises questions about autonomy, governance, and the practicalities of implementing international agendas at the local level.

Five Milestones of the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program

The PCP program involves five milestones that guide municipalities in addressing climate change:

1. **Detailed Analysis of Energy Consumption and Waste:** Municipalities collect and analyze energy consumption and waste data across all sectors and sources.
2. **Setting Reduction Targets:** Reduction targets are established, often aiming for net zero emissions by 2050.
3. **Developing and Implementing Local Action Plans:** Plans generally include purchasing electric vehicles, training staff, exploring renewable energy, conducting energy audits, and adopting green building standards.
4. **Endorsing a Climate Action Plan:** Local councils endorse the action plan, which frequently includes declarations of climate emergencies to galvanize public opinion and justify expenditures and policy changes.
5. **Repeating the Data Collection Process:** Continuous data collection and monitoring track community progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), creating a cyclical process that can pressure councils to adopt costly green technologies and policies without thorough scrutiny.

Each milestone encourages further integration into the PCP framework, which may place financial and operational strain on municipalities over time.

Key Concerns with the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program

The Partners for Climate Protection program (PCP) involves municipalities in collecting extensive data, setting CO₂ reduction targets, and implementing Climate Action Plans that align with global climate agendas. While the program may claim to support sustainable development, it often introduces challenges and unintended consequences for local communities. Here are some critical considerations:

1. Local Autonomy: Global Agendas Reduce Local Control

Global climate initiatives, like those promoted in the PCP program, can reduce the decision-making power of local councils and communities. These initiatives often require adherence to international targets that may not align with the unique needs, priorities, or conditions of local areas, particularly in rural or sparsely populated regions. This emphasis on global goals can limit the ability of local governments to address pressing community-specific concerns and undermines the principle of local governance.

2. Financial Burden: Ongoing, Unclear Costs

The PCP program and similar initiatives can impose significant financial costs on municipalities. Climate Action Plans often require ongoing investments for infrastructure, monitoring, and compliance with program targets. Many of these costs are not clearly defined upfront, leaving municipalities financially committed to obligations that could strain budgets and redirect funds from essential services. This financial burden may also result in increased taxes or fees for residents.

3. Privacy Risks: Community Data Collection Raises Concerns

Extensive data collection is a core component of the PCP program, including data on energy use, transportation patterns, and even community behaviors. This collection can raise privacy concerns, especially if personal data is shared with third-party organizations or used to monitor individual activities. Ensuring that data remains confidential and secure is critical, as privacy protections are essential to maintaining trust between municipalities and their residents.

4. Housing Impact: Increases Urbanization and Affects Affordability

Global climate programs often push for urban densification and higher-density housing to meet emissions targets. This can contribute to urbanization pressures that may not be suitable or sustainable for all communities. Increased urbanization can lead to rising property costs, affecting housing affordability and accessibility for local residents. Rural areas and small towns may find themselves incentivized or pressured to adopt policies

that reshape traditional housing landscapes, which may not reflect the community's character or preferences.

5. Local Issues: Global Goals Overshadow Urgent Local Needs

Global climate objectives can often overshadow urgent local priorities, such as water quality, infrastructure maintenance, waste management, and economic stability. By focusing heavily on CO₂ reduction and other global targets, councils may neglect the immediate, tangible issues that directly affect the quality of life for community members. Redirecting attention to these critical, localized issues may yield more impactful and practical results for residents, ensuring that resources are invested in areas that offer visible, immediate community benefits.

Summary

The PCP program's global focus can introduce challenges that undermine local control, increase financial burdens, and raise privacy and housing concerns, potentially leaving local priorities sidelined. Municipalities may find that advocating for community-centered solutions and focusing on direct environmental stewardship—such as pollution prevention, water quality, and sustainable land use—serves their residents more effectively than global climate commitments. By prioritizing local autonomy and practical, community-focused solutions, municipalities can better support the unique needs and values of their residents.

Philosophy of Localism: Prioritizing Community Over Global Agendas

Across Canada, over 500 municipalities have joined the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, a global initiative aimed at setting climate targets and implementing Climate Action Plans. While the program promotes CO₂ reduction and urban densification, it also diverts municipal funds and focus from local priorities to globally aligned agendas. This shift has contributed to a range of urban and rural challenges, from housing affordability crises and increased debt burdens to mental health struggles and the gradual decline of small towns. Now more than ever, municipal councils are encouraged to reclaim local autonomy and refocus on community needs—a philosophy rooted in the principles of localism.

The Impacts of Global Agendas on Canadian Municipalities

The PCP program's influence on Canadian municipalities has led to significant transformations, particularly in urban centers. By prioritizing global emissions targets and urban densification over local concerns, the program has contributed to:

1. Housing and Affordability Crises

Climate-focused policies often push for high-density urban housing, which may not suit the needs or lifestyle preferences of all Canadian residents. This trend increases demand for limited urban housing, driving up property costs and making homeownership less attainable. Simultaneously, the rush to accommodate urban growth can lead to underinvestment in small towns and rural areas, where housing options become limited as resources are channeled toward urban expansion.

2. Municipal Debt and Financial Strain

Compliance with PCP mandates, from data collection to infrastructure upgrades, requires extensive financial commitment. Municipalities may take on debt or reallocate funds from essential services to finance these initiatives. In the long run, this debt burden diverts local budgets away from core services—such as maintaining public safety, infrastructure, and recreation—resulting in diminished service quality and increased financial strain on local governments and residents.

3. Mental Health and Community Well-Being

As urban centers expand and densify, residents experience increased pressures from cost-of-living surges, congestion, and reduced access to green spaces. Studies show that higher-density living can contribute to mental health challenges, including heightened stress and a diminished sense of community. Rural areas and small towns, meanwhile, are at risk of stagnation or decline as younger residents are drawn to urban centers. This urban-centric focus neglects the broader social

and economic fabric of Canadian communities, leading to isolation and reduced well-being in less densely populated regions.

4. **The Decline of Small Towns and Rural Communities**

Small towns and rural areas are often overlooked in global climate agendas. Funding and attention are directed toward urban areas, leading to the gradual decline of small communities. This imbalance can erode local economies, as small businesses close and young people move away in search of opportunities that are no longer viable locally. This trend not only threatens the heritage and identity of small communities but also disrupts the balanced development of Canada as a whole.

The Philosophy of Localism: A Call for Community-Centered Governance

The philosophy of localism emphasizes the importance of community-centered governance, where local councils prioritize the unique needs and values of their residents over global agendas. By embracing localism, municipalities can:

- **Reclaim Local Autonomy**
Local councils are urged to re-evaluate their commitments to international programs like the PCP and consider refocusing on policies that reflect local priorities and conditions. Local autonomy ensures that communities have the freedom to make decisions that directly benefit their residents, especially in rural areas and small towns where local culture, lifestyle, and environmental needs may differ significantly from urban centers.
- **Direct Funds to Local Priorities**
Redirecting funds from global climate programs back to essential community services and local infrastructure can have an immediate, positive impact. By focusing on practical needs—such as maintaining clean water, preserving public parks, and improving public transportation—municipal councils can enhance the quality of life for residents without incurring the high costs and restrictive mandates of global programs.
- **Promote Balanced Development**
Localism advocates for balanced growth, where small towns and rural areas are given equal consideration alongside urban centers. Supporting small businesses, local agriculture, and sustainable tourism can revitalize small communities, making them attractive for residents and investors alike. By investing in the unique assets of each community, municipalities can create resilient local economies that provide opportunities without relying on extensive urbanization.

- **Prioritize Environmental Stewardship Over Global Targets**

Localism does not mean disregarding environmental responsibility. On the contrary, it emphasizes pollution prevention, habitat preservation, and sustainable practices tailored to local ecosystems. Rather than focusing on CO₂ reduction targets, municipalities can invest in protecting their local environment through actions like improving water quality, reducing waste, and promoting energy efficiency—all of which have immediate, visible benefits for residents.

A Path Forward: Localism in Action

Municipal councils across Canada are urged to reassess their commitments to global programs and refocus on the pressing needs of their own communities. By stepping back from global climate agendas and embracing localism, municipalities can:

1. **Foster Community Engagement**

Invite residents to share their priorities and concerns through town hall meetings, surveys, and forums. A community-centered approach respects the voices of local residents and ensures that their input shapes policy decisions.

2. **Celebrate Local Identity and Resilience**

Strengthen community bonds by investing in local culture, heritage, and businesses. Support for local farms, markets, and small enterprises promotes self-sufficiency and preserves the distinct character of each community.

3. **Create Locally Tailored Environmental Solutions**

Invest in practical, localized environmental initiatives that address pollution, water management, and land conservation. By focusing on tangible improvements, municipalities can enhance the local environment in ways that directly benefit residents without the costs associated with global programs.

4. **Develop Community-Based Housing Solutions**

Instead of pushing high-density urbanization, consider solutions that reflect local housing needs and values. Rural and suburban areas may benefit more from policies supporting family homes, affordable housing, and small-scale development, preserving the character and affordability of these communities.

Conclusion

Localism is a philosophy of governance that values local control, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship. As Canadian municipalities consider the impact of the PCP program and other global initiatives, they are encouraged to reflect on the needs of their communities and to advocate for policies that respect local autonomy and prioritize

residents' quality of life. By reclaiming local decision-making power, municipalities can ensure that resources are invested in ways that directly benefit their residents, preserve their unique character, and create a more balanced, resilient Canada.

Local Environmental Stewardship: A Mandate for Canadian Municipalities

In Canada, municipalities have a duty to focus on local environmental stewardship, ensuring that their actions address the immediate needs and ecological health of their communities. This responsibility includes managing essential services, maintaining green spaces, and protecting local water sources. Canadian municipalities are not obligated to pursue global sustainability goals; rather, their mandate is to prioritize environmental efforts that directly benefit their residents and local ecosystems.

While programs like the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) may emphasize global sustainability goals, municipalities are encouraged to center their resources on practical, community-focused initiatives. Redirecting attention from international targets to local stewardship allows Canadian municipalities to fulfill their core duties without the pressures of meeting distant global agendas. Here are several areas where municipalities can exercise this local stewardship:

1. Tree Planting and Green Spaces

Expanding tree cover and preserving green spaces are fundamental to creating healthier, more resilient communities. These projects provide cleaner air, reduce urban heat, support local wildlife, and enhance residents' quality of life. By investing in these areas, municipalities ensure their environmental efforts align directly with their communities' well-being and resilience.

2. Local Food Production

Municipalities can support local food initiatives, such as community gardens and local markets, which reduce reliance on imported food and strengthen community food security. By focusing on sustainable local agriculture, municipalities support not only the environment but also the local economy, giving residents access to fresh, locally produced food while reducing transportation emissions.

3. Water Conservation Initiatives

Ensuring access to clean, sustainable water supplies is an essential responsibility for Canadian municipalities. Water conservation programs, rainwater harvesting, and efficient irrigation practices are effective ways to maintain local water resources. Local stewardship in water management helps safeguard this critical resource, ensuring that communities are resilient against droughts and water shortages.

4. Pollinator Habitats

Canadian agriculture and biodiversity depend on pollinators like bees and butterflies. By creating and maintaining pollinator-friendly habitats, municipalities

can support local agriculture, improve biodiversity, and contribute to food security. Pollinator initiatives reflect municipalities' commitment to sustaining local ecosystems, providing benefits that residents can see and appreciate directly.

5. **Wildlife Conservation Projects**

Canadian municipalities are stewards of their unique natural habitats, and local conservation efforts help protect wildlife and preserve the character of each region. Through conservation areas, habitat restoration, and responsible land management, municipalities can promote biodiversity and protect at-risk species, fulfilling their local duty without the influence of global programs.

6. **Waste Management Programs**

Effective waste management is critical for local environmental health, ensuring that residents live in cleaner, healthier surroundings. Municipalities can prioritize recycling, composting, and waste reduction initiatives, addressing pollution and resource conservation at a community level. These programs are essential for public health and reduce environmental impact in ways that residents see and experience daily.

7. **Hazardous Waste Drop-Offs**

Hazardous waste disposal is an essential local service, protecting water sources and soil from contamination. By providing safe drop-off locations for hazardous materials, municipalities fulfill their stewardship role, ensuring that environmental health and safety remain priorities for the entire community.

Prioritizing Local Over Global: The Benefits

By centering on local environmental stewardship, municipalities honor their legal obligations and core responsibilities to their communities. Unlike global sustainability goals, which may not address local needs, community-based stewardship efforts provide tangible, immediate benefits:

- **Aligned with Municipal Mandate:** Local stewardship reflects municipalities' primary duty to protect and improve their immediate environment. Canadian municipalities are obligated to manage issues like waste disposal, pollution prevention, and local water quality—not global CO₂ reduction targets.
- **Practical and Achievable:** Local environmental initiatives, such as tree planting and water conservation, can be implemented with local resources and expertise, achieving real results without the high costs and complexities of international programs.

- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Community-focused efforts, like expanding green spaces and creating pollinator habitats, provide clear health and recreational benefits for residents, improving their day-to-day experience and fostering a sense of community pride.
- **Efficient Use of Resources:** Municipal resources can be directed toward projects that have immediate impacts on residents, avoiding the financial strain associated with global programs and instead delivering services that directly meet community needs.

A Call to Refocus on Local Stewardship

Canadian municipalities are encouraged to evaluate the practical needs of their communities and commit to environmental efforts that reflect those priorities. By emphasizing local stewardship, municipalities can build stronger, healthier communities while fulfilling their core responsibilities to residents. This approach ensures that environmental protection remains practical, relevant, and beneficial, grounding sustainability efforts in the specific needs of each community.

In summary, Canadian municipalities should prioritize their mandate of local environmental stewardship over the adoption of global sustainability goals. This commitment to practical, community-centered initiatives reinforces municipalities' roles as stewards of their local environment, safeguarding resources and enhancing quality of life for residents.

Understanding CO₂ and Canada's Role: A Rationale for Prioritizing Local Stewardship

The FCM ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program is founded on the premise that human activities, particularly CO₂ emissions, are the primary cause of catastrophic climate change. This rationale has led to significant emphasis on CO₂ reduction, which often comes at a financial and operational cost to municipalities. However, understanding the actual role of CO₂, especially within Canada's unique environmental context, challenges the effectiveness and relevance of these policies for Canadian communities.

CO₂: Essential for Life, Not a Pollutant

CO₂, or carbon dioxide, is a naturally occurring gas essential for life on Earth. Plants rely on CO₂ for photosynthesis, a process that produces the oxygen we breathe and serves as the foundation for nearly all ecosystems. Unlike pollutants that harm health and the environment in concentrated amounts, CO₂ in the atmosphere supports the cycle of life.

CO₂'s Small Presence in the Atmosphere

CO₂ makes up only about 0.04% of the Earth's atmosphere. Out of this small percentage, human activity contributes around 4% of the total CO₂ emissions, meaning that human-generated CO₂ is a fraction of a fraction of atmospheric composition. This minor proportion challenges the idea that CO₂ from human activity alone is significantly impacting global conditions.

Canada's Unique Position: A Vast, Sparsely Populated Nation

As one of the largest countries on Earth, Canada has vast tracts of wilderness and forests with a relatively small population spread over an expansive area. This distribution means that Canadians naturally have a higher need for energy to heat homes, cook, and travel across long distances, especially in rural and northern regions where options for transportation and heating may be limited.

Forests as Powerful Carbon Sinks

Canada's forests play a crucial role as natural carbon sinks, absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere. These forests not only support diverse ecosystems but also help offset the CO₂ emissions produced by human activities in Canada. In fact, Canada's forests absorb such significant amounts of CO₂ that they likely counterbalance or even exceed the CO₂ emissions from human sources within the country.

Canada's Global CO₂ Contribution: Minimal and Insignificant

On a global scale, Canada's net contribution of CO₂ is minimal. Given its extensive natural carbon-absorbing resources and comparatively low population density, Canada's impact

on global CO₂ levels is effectively insignificant. Thus, large-scale CO₂ reduction policies in Canada may have little to no measurable effect on the global atmosphere but could impose significant costs on Canadians, especially in rural and colder regions.

Practical Implications for Canadians

Given Canada's minimal net CO₂ contribution and the natural CO₂-absorbing role of its forests, Canadian policies should focus on practical environmental stewardship, such as pollution reduction, protecting waterways, and supporting sustainable land use. This approach prioritizes local environmental health and aligns with the unique needs and conditions of Canadian communities without the undue burden of CO₂-focused mandates that may not make a significant difference globally.

Liability Concerns: Responsibility on Local Councils

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Government of Canada, and ICLEI Canada have waived liability for the outcomes and impacts of the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, effectively transferring full responsibility for the program's implementation onto local councils. This waiver of liability means that while these organizations promote and guide municipalities through Climate Action Plans and CO₂ reduction initiatives, they bear no accountability for any financial, legal, or operational issues that may arise from a municipality's participation in the program. Local councils are therefore left solely accountable for the risks and potential consequences of implementing the PCP agenda.

Here are key areas of concern stemming from this liability waiver:

1. Financial Risk

With liability placed solely on local councils, municipalities are at increased financial risk. Compliance with PCP requirements often necessitates costly infrastructure upgrades, extensive data collection, and administrative oversight—all of which are long-term financial commitments. Without shared accountability, local councils may find themselves dealing with unanticipated expenses, which could strain municipal budgets, redirect resources from essential services, or even necessitate increased taxes for residents to cover program costs.

2. Legal Responsibility

By accepting full responsibility for the PCP program, local councils may face legal obligations related to data privacy, regulatory compliance, and environmental impact. Should the implementation of climate-related mandates lead to disputes or legal challenges, municipalities could be held accountable without support from the FCM, Government of Canada, or ICLEI Canada. Councils must carefully assess the legal implications of the program, including the potential for disputes over land use, property rights, and privacy issues.

3. Operational and Administrative Burden

Climate Action Plans under the PCP program require extensive administration, including data monitoring, reporting, and compliance tracking. This adds an operational burden on municipal staff, often requiring specialized knowledge and resources that smaller or rural councils may lack. With full liability resting on local councils, any failure to meet these operational demands could lead to administrative challenges, potentially impacting other local services and creating an undue workload on council staff.

4. Risk to Local Autonomy

While the program promotes global climate goals, the waiver of liability places all responsibility on municipalities without giving them full flexibility to adjust policies based on local needs. This setup can constrain councils' ability to prioritize community-centered solutions, as they may feel obligated to fulfill global targets to avoid perceived non-compliance. Local councils may face challenges if they attempt to adjust or withdraw from program mandates, potentially affecting their autonomy in decision-making.

5. Potential Reputational Damage

Should the program lead to unanticipated outcomes, such as increased costs, disruptions to local services, or negative environmental impacts, local councils may bear the brunt of public criticism. Without liability on the part of FCM, the federal government, or ICLEI Canada, councils could be left solely responsible for defending the program's results to their constituents, potentially facing reputational harm if residents feel that the initiatives are not in their best interest.

Due Diligence for Municipal Councils

Given these concerns, councils are encouraged to conduct thorough due diligence before committing to or continuing participation in the PCP program. Councils may wish to:

- **Assess Financial Implications:** Calculate both short- and long-term costs of program compliance and determine if they align with available resources and community priorities.
- **Evaluate Legal Risks:** Review the program's legal requirements and consult legal experts to understand the potential liabilities associated with data privacy, property rights, and compliance.
- **Consider Operational Capacity:** Ensure the council has the necessary staff, training, and administrative resources to fulfill program requirements without impacting essential services.
- **Engage Community Consultation:** Solicit input from residents to understand their priorities and gauge community support for the program. This feedback can help councils make decisions that genuinely reflect local interests.
- **Explore Flexibility Options:** Investigate the possibility of tailoring the program's goals or actions to better align with community needs. Some councils may find that focusing on locally driven environmental stewardship offers a more practical path forward.

Conclusion

The liability waiver from FCM, the Government of Canada, and ICLEI Canada leaves local councils solely responsible for the PCP program's implementation, placing them at risk for financial, legal, and operational challenges. Before committing to or continuing in the program, councils are urged to carefully weigh these risks, prioritize transparency with their communities, and ensure that any actions align with the specific needs and well-being of their residents.

Practical Implications for Canadians

Given Canada's unique environmental position, limited population density, and abundant natural carbon sinks, Canadian municipalities could more effectively serve their communities by focusing on practical environmental stewardship over global CO₂ reduction mandates. This local approach prioritizes actions that directly improve community well-being and environmental health:

- **Pollution Reduction:** Prioritize reducing pollutants that directly impact air and water quality, ensuring healthier ecosystems and communities.
- **Protecting Waterways:** Support initiatives that safeguard clean water sources, which is vital for both environmental health and public safety.
- **Sustainable Land Use:** Promote sustainable practices that protect local habitats, preserve biodiversity, and ensure responsible resource use.

Recommendation for Canadian Municipalities

Given that Canada's contribution to global CO₂ is negligible and that local environmental issues are more immediate and impactful for residents, municipalities are encouraged to prioritize community-centered stewardship over global climate agendas. By redirecting efforts and resources to address pollution, water quality, waste management, and habitat preservation, municipalities can provide visible, meaningful benefits for residents without the financial burden of CO₂ reduction mandates that have limited global impact.

Steps to Reclaim Local Autonomy

- **Withdraw from the FCM ICLEI PCP Program:** To focus on relevant local issues, councils are encouraged to consider formal withdrawal from the PCP program, which places CO₂ reduction above pressing community needs.
- **Adopt a Local Stewardship Resolution:** Municipal councils can adopt a resolution that refocuses efforts on immediate environmental and community health concerns, such as pollution prevention, water conservation, and local food security.
- **Inform the FCM of Withdrawal:** After adopting the resolution, notify the Federation of Canadian Municipalities of the council's decision to redirect its priorities toward local stewardship that directly benefits the community.

Local stewardship respects the unique ecological and practical realities of Canadian communities, ensuring that environmental efforts are both relevant and sustainable for residents. This approach reinforces the importance of local governance, allowing

municipalities to fulfill their role as custodians of their environment in ways that align with the immediate needs of their communities.

Important Budget Considerations for Canadian Municipalities Participating in the PCP Program

As Canadian municipalities prepare their budgets for the coming year, it's essential to understand the financial implications of continued participation in the **Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program**. The PCP program, developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and ICLEI Canada, requires participating municipalities to meet various milestones in developing and implementing Climate Action Plans. Each of these milestones incurs costs that can significantly impact municipal budgets.

It is also crucial to note that **the FCM, ICLEI Canada, and the Government of Canada have waived all liability for the outcomes of this program**, meaning that **the full responsibility for all associated costs and liabilities rests solely on participating municipalities**. However, municipalities are not bound by contract to remain in the program and are **free to withdraw at any time** if they determine that the costs, liabilities, or commitments do not align with their community's needs or financial priorities.

Cost Breakdown for Municipalities Participating in the PCP Program and Climate Action Plans

Participating in the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program and implementing Climate Action Plans incurs significant costs for municipalities at each milestone. While initial membership in the PCP program may be free, achieving its milestones and implementing climate-focused infrastructure projects involve considerable investments in planning, technology, and capital upgrades. These costs vary depending on a municipality's size, goals, and capacity for implementation but can range from tens of thousands to millions of dollars.

Milestone-by-Milestone Cost Breakdown

The PCP program includes five key milestones that municipalities work through to develop and implement Climate Action Plans. Here are the typical costs involved at each milestone:

Milestone 1: Create a Baseline Emissions Inventory and Forecast

This initial stage involves gathering and analyzing detailed data on the municipality's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from various sources, including buildings, transportation, and waste.

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Costs for data gathering can be substantial, especially if consultants or specialized software are needed to establish accurate baseline emissions.
- **Staff Training and Coordination:** Training in-house staff to manage the inventory may incur additional costs, particularly in smaller municipalities with limited capacity.
- **Technology and Tools:** Purchasing software or licenses for emissions tracking can also contribute to upfront expenses.

Estimated Cost Range: \$10,000 - \$50,000

Milestone 2: Set Emissions Reduction Targets

Setting achievable and science-based emissions reduction targets requires strategic planning, analysis, and public engagement.

- **Consultation and Planning:** Costs for consultants or climate specialists to determine realistic targets based on baseline data.
- **Public Engagement:** Hosting community forums, surveys, and workshops to gather input on goals incurs costs for venue rental, materials, and staff time.
- **Strategic Alignment Meetings:** Staff and consultant hours are needed to align targets with municipal resources and priorities.

Estimated Cost Range: \$5,000 - \$25,000

Milestone 3: Develop a Local Action Plan

This milestone involves drafting a detailed Climate Action Plan that outlines specific initiatives to meet emissions targets. This step is generally resource-intensive.

- **Research and Strategy Development:** Hiring experts to research potential actions, conduct feasibility studies, and draft a comprehensive plan.
- **Community Engagement and Consultations:** Additional meetings and materials to ensure the plan reflects local input.
- **Legal and Compliance Reviews:** Ensuring alignment with regulatory standards often requires legal counsel or compliance experts.

- **Staffing Costs:** Staff may spend months or even years developing and coordinating the plan, resulting in diverted resources from other responsibilities.

Estimated Cost Range: \$20,000 - \$100,000

Milestone 4: Implement the Local Action Plan

Implementation is the most capital-intensive phase, involving substantial infrastructure investments to bring the Climate Action Plan to life.

- **Project Costs:** High-cost projects like energy-efficient building upgrades, waste management overhauls, or public transit expansions.
- **Capital Expenditures:** Investing in infrastructure, such as solar installations, building retrofits, or renewable energy sources.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ongoing assessments require additional tools, software, and personnel to measure effectiveness.

Estimated Cost Range: \$50,000 - \$1,000,000+ (depending on scope and complexity)

Milestone 5: Monitor Progress and Report Results

Monitoring progress against set targets and reporting to stakeholders is crucial for transparency and accountability.

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Regular monitoring requires specialized personnel or partnerships with third-party evaluators.
- **Annual Reporting:** Preparing public reports incurs costs for design, printing, and communications staff.
- **Community Updates and Engagement:** Keeping residents informed through town halls, website updates, or newsletters requires further resources.

Estimated Cost Range: \$10,000 - \$50,000 annually

High-Capital Expenditures Beyond Milestone Costs

Beyond the structured milestones, larger capital investments are often required for implementing ambitious climate initiatives. These costs can escalate substantially when

municipalities adopt initiatives like upgrading vehicle fleets, developing 15-minute city models, or enhancing public transit networks. Here are some of the high-capital expenditure areas:

1. Municipal Fleet Upgrades

- **Cost Considerations:** Transitioning to electric or hybrid vehicles for municipal fleets can cost from \$500,000 to \$5,000,000 or more, depending on fleet size and the extent of the transition.
- **Charging Infrastructure:** Setting up EV charging stations for municipal use and public access requires substantial investment, including installation, power upgrades, and maintenance.

2. EV Charging Stations

- **Cost Considerations:** Installing a single EV charging station costs between \$10,000 to \$50,000. Larger networks with fast chargers will increase costs.
- **Public and Municipal Use:** Expanding access to residents and employees further increases operational and maintenance costs.

3. Smart City Technology

- **Cost Considerations:** Smart city infrastructure, including sensors for traffic, air quality, and energy use, involves substantial setup and operational costs, typically ranging from \$500,000 to \$5,000,000.
- **Data Systems:** Systems to collect, analyze, and act on this data may require upgrades in IT infrastructure and staff training.

4. Circular Economy Initiatives

- **Cost Considerations:** Developing waste reduction facilities for recycling, composting, and repurposing materials involves initial capital for new equipment, construction, and outreach, often totaling \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000.
- **Community Engagement:** Programs to educate residents about waste reduction may incur ongoing operational expenses.

5. 15-Minute City Model

- **Cost Considerations:** Creating a 15-minute city model requires extensive redevelopment to introduce mixed-use zoning, public amenities, and active

transportation infrastructure. This can cost between \$5,000,000 and \$50,000,000, depending on the municipality's size and needs.

- **Public Engagement and Transition Costs:** Ensuring community buy-in for neighborhood-level changes involves consultations and phased implementation, adding to costs.

6. Active Transportation Networks

- **Cost Considerations:** Building bike lanes, pedestrian paths, and transit hubs involves significant capital outlay. A dedicated bike lane, for example, can cost \$100,000 - \$1,000,000 per kilometer.
- **Maintenance and Safety Upgrades:** Infrastructure maintenance, including lighting, signage, and protective barriers, requires recurring investment.

7. Urban Densification

- **Cost Considerations:** Densification through affordable housing and high-density zoning requires substantial investment, typically between \$5,000,000 and \$100,000,000.
- **Supporting Infrastructure:** Higher densities necessitate upgraded sewer, water, and energy systems, adding to capital costs.

Summary of Potential Costs Across Milestones and High-Capital Initiatives

Milestone/Initiative Estimated Cost Range

1. Baseline Emissions Inventory	\$10,000 - \$50,000
2. Emissions Reduction Targets	\$5,000 - \$25,000
3. Local Action Plan	\$20,000 - \$100,000
4. Implement Action Plan	\$50,000 - \$1,000,000+
5. Monitor and Report Results	\$10,000 - \$50,000 annually
Fleet Upgrades	\$500,000 - \$5,000,000+
EV Charging Stations	\$100,000 - \$1,000,000+
Smart City Technology	\$500,000 - \$5,000,000+
Circular Economy Initiatives	\$1,000,000 - \$10,000,000+

15-Minute City Model	\$5,000,000 - \$50,000,000+
Active Transportation Networks	\$1,000,000 - \$20,000,000+
Urban Densification	\$5,000,000 - \$100,000,000+
Total Potential Cost Range:	From \$7,200,000 to over \$192,000,000+

Concerns About Participation: The "Free" Appeal of the PCP Program

It is concerning that **522 Canadian municipalities** joined the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, many of them likely motivated by the appeal of a “free” membership. While the program itself doesn’t charge membership fees, the full scope of responsibilities, costs, and liabilities that come with implementing the PCP milestones was not necessarily clear to many councils at the outset. The initial appeal of a no-cost entry into the program may have led municipalities to overlook the significant, ongoing financial and operational commitments required to meet the program's goals. These costs are often substantial, creating budgetary burdens that can far exceed the resources available to many municipalities. For smaller or rural municipalities, in particular, these unanticipated financial obligations can have profound impacts on their ability to deliver essential services or invest in other community priorities.

Lack of Shared Liability

An additional concern is that **the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), ICLEI Canada, and the Government of Canada have waived all liability for the program's outcomes**, placing full responsibility on local councils. This means that while municipalities face the financial and operational demands of the program, they are left to shoulder all associated risks alone. If the program’s initiatives lead to financial strain, legal challenges, or public dissatisfaction, the municipality alone is accountable, without any support from the organizations promoting the program.

The Importance of Full Transparency

Given these factors, it’s essential for municipalities to fully understand the implications of participating in the PCP program and the potential impacts on their budgets and resources. For municipalities that joined under the assumption of “no cost,” the hidden financial and operational responsibilities may feel unexpected and burdensome.

Recommendations for Municipal Councils

- **Review and Reassess Participation in the PCP Program**
Conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis to determine if continued participation is feasible and aligned with budgetary priorities.

- **Evaluate Budget Impacts and Fiscal Responsibilities**
Factor in both short- and long-term costs of the PCP program and related climate initiatives to ensure responsible budget planning that reflects community priorities.
- **Reevaluate Participation:** Councils should conduct a thorough review of the costs and obligations associated with the PCP program and determine if continued participation aligns with their community’s financial and operational priorities.
- **Consider Alternative Environmental Initiatives:** For many municipalities, focusing on practical, local environmental efforts—such as pollution prevention, water conservation, and habitat preservation—can provide direct community benefits without the extensive financial commitments of the PCP program.
- **Exercise the Right to Withdraw:** Municipalities are free to exit the PCP program at any time. Councils that find the program’s financial and operational demands unsustainable may choose to withdraw, refocusing their efforts on projects that better serve their communities.
- **Notify FCM of Any Withdrawal Decisions**
Should a council decide to withdraw, it is recommended to formally notify the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) of the decision. This ensures that resources and funds can be reallocated to locally driven projects.

The appeal of “free” participation in the PCP program has led to widespread involvement, but the true costs and liabilities suggest that councils should carefully assess whether this program remains in their community’s best interest. By maintaining transparency and aligning decisions with community needs, municipalities can ensure that their resources are used effectively and responsibly.

Conclusion

The PCP program milestones and related Climate Action Plan initiatives require substantial financial commitment. Municipalities should weigh these costs against local priorities and capacity, as high-capital projects like urban densification, fleet upgrades, and smart technology add long-term financial burdens that may impact budgets for years. Careful consideration of fiscal impacts and community needs is crucial before committing to the PCP program and its ambitious goals.

By weighing the costs and liabilities against the potential benefits, Canadian municipalities can make informed decisions that prioritize local needs, fiscal responsibility, and

community well-being. Municipal councils are encouraged to take advantage of their ability to withdraw if they determine that the PCP program no longer serves the best interests of their residents.

Recommendation: Withdraw from the FCM ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program

In light of the financial, legal, and operational risks posed by the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program—and the full liability placed on local councils for its implementation—we recommend that Canadian municipalities consider formally withdrawing from the PCP program. By refocusing on local environmental stewardship, councils can prioritize projects that directly benefit their communities, align with local values, and respect the principles of autonomy and accountability.

Here is a step-by-step guide for councils wishing to proceed with withdrawal from the PCP program:

- 1. Visit kiclei.ca**

Learn more about the philosophy of localism and explore resources designed to support municipalities in transitioning away from global climate mandates toward practical, community-centered environmental solutions.

- 2. Download the Resolution**

Access the recommended resolution template from the KICLEI website. The resolution outlines the rationale for withdrawal and emphasizes the importance of focusing on local needs, environmental stewardship, and municipal autonomy.

- 3. Adopt the Resolution**

Present the resolution at a council meeting for discussion and adoption. By formally adopting this resolution, the council commits to redirecting its focus from global CO₂ targets to initiatives that address immediate local concerns and benefit the community directly.

- 4. Inform the FCM of Withdrawal**

After adopting the resolution, notify the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and ICLEI Canada of the council's decision to withdraw from the PCP program. This formal notification ensures that the council's withdrawal is officially recorded and that resources previously allocated to the PCP program can be reallocated to community priorities.

By taking these steps, councils can exercise their right to self-determination, protect community interests, and invest in local projects that foster environmental health, economic resilience, and community well-being.

Resolution to Withdraw from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program**Resolution No. [Insert Number]**

Title: Resolution for the Withdrawal of [Municipality's Name] from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) Program

WHEREAS the [Municipality's Name] joined the FCM ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program with the intent of advancing local environmental stewardship;

AND WHEREAS the PCP program aligns local municipalities with global climate agendas, which may not reflect the unique priorities, needs, or circumstances of [Municipality's Name] or its residents;

AND WHEREAS the PCP program requires significant financial, administrative, and operational resources to implement milestones, including data collection, emissions reduction targets, Climate Action Plan development, and continued monitoring, which can place substantial strain on the [Municipality's Name]'s budget;

AND WHEREAS the FCM, ICLEI Canada, and the Government of Canada have waived all liability for the implementation of the PCP program, effectively placing the financial, legal, and operational responsibility solely on participating municipalities;

AND WHEREAS participation in the PCP program raises concerns related to data collection and privacy, local autonomy, and the potential for policies that may impact housing affordability, rural community vitality, and municipal decision-making;

AND WHEREAS [Municipality's Name] prioritizes the well-being of its residents, the preservation of local autonomy, and a commitment to community-centered environmental stewardship tailored to the specific needs and values of its community;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT [Municipality's Name] formally withdraws from the FCM ICLEI Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, effective immediately;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT [Municipality's Name] commits to developing and implementing a local environmental stewardship strategy that addresses pollution prevention, water quality, green spaces, and sustainable resource management, prioritizing projects that directly benefit the community and align with its unique needs and fiscal responsibilities;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the [Municipality's Name] council directs the Clerk to inform the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and ICLEI Canada of this decision to withdraw from the PCP program.

Date of Adoption: [Insert Date]

Moved by: [Councillor's Name]

Seconded by: [Councillor's Name]

Approved by the Council of [Municipality's Name] on [Date].

This resolution enables [Municipality's Name] to shift its focus to locally-driven environmental goals and uphold its commitment to protecting the community's interests, autonomy, and financial well-being.