



**CLEAN CITIES
RESEARCH**

PHASE 4 FOCUS GROUPS

Report - August 2026

ENVIRONICS
RESEARCH

 **Eco**Analytics



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Part 1:

Introduction

Background on the Clean Cities research project, goals, and approach to Phase 4.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

*The Research
Story so far...*

1

Phase 1 – Understanding end-user needs

Municipal staff, elected officials, and environmental organizations were consulted to identify their information gaps and challenges related to building public support for municipal climate action. These needs guided the rest of the project.

2

Phase 2 – Understanding building industry perspectives

Qualitative interviews with building contractors in BC and building owner/operators in Ontario explored barriers, opportunities, and implementation realities related to building decarbonization.

3

Phase 3 – Understanding public opinion quantitatively

A large-scale survey examined support for municipal climate policies across key audience segments in Ontario and British Columbia. Findings showed support exists, but is often shaped by affordability, implementation, trust, and perceived benefits.

4

Phase 4 – Understanding how to build support

Qualitative focus groups explored how residents think about municipal climate action in an affordability-focused environment, and which benefits and messages help build support.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Main question to answer in Phase 4:
How can municipalities and environmental organizations build support for climate initiatives when affordability dominates the public agenda?

Specifically, this phase of the project explores:

- How residents define and think about affordability in the context of specific municipal climate initiatives
- How people evaluate the trade-offs of municipal climate investment
- Reactions to messages intended to build public support for these important initiatives
- Reactions to framing climate initiatives around other benefits (that connect to top-of-mind issues) rather than climate change itself.

RESEARCH METHODS

Environics Research conducted six focus groups between June 23-25, 2026.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Date	June 23	June 23	June 24	June 24	June 25	June 25
Segment	Progressive Activists	Progressive Activists	Civic Nationals	Civic Nationals	Centrist Liberals	Centrist Liberals
Region	Toronto/ GTHA	Vancouver/ CRD	Toronto/ GTHA	Vancouver/ CRD	Toronto/ GTHA	Vancouver/ CRD
Participants	8	8	5	7	7	8

Each focus group discussion was 90-mins in duration and conducted online via Zoom. All 43 focus group participants were recruited from Phase 3 survey respondents who gave consent to be contacted for participation in follow-up research. The target audience for these groups were the three most climate engaged segments in EcoAnalytics CA-MAP Segmentation.

Groups were organized by region and segment to be able to analyze the results by segment and municipality. Participants were also recruited to reflect a variety of ages, genders, education, income levels, and living situation, which is shown on the next page.

This research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. It is intended to provide insight into how participants think about and react to the issues discussed, rather than to measure the prevalence of those views in the broader population. Findings should therefore be interpreted as directional rather than statistically representative.

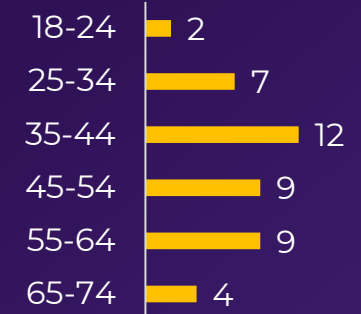
PARTICIPANT PROFILE

N=43

Gender



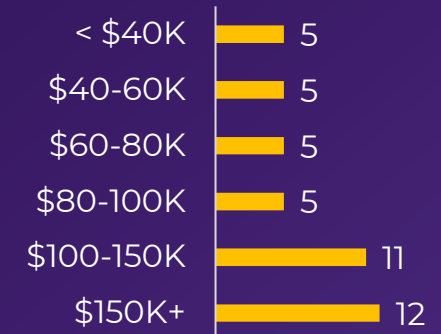
Age



Education



Income



Housing



Part 2:

Key Takeaways

Summary of findings from focus groups

KEY TAKE- AWAYS

1

Fairness emerged as an important lens through which residents evaluate municipal investments. Participants assessed the municipal initiatives presented based on who they think will benefit, who might be left out, and whether public funds are being used in ways that benefit the broader community. Community-wide benefits were seen as more worthwhile than benefits aimed at individuals within the community which is why the Public Infrastructure initiative generated support over the Home & Building option. It was viewed as benefiting everyone rather than a subset of residents.

2

The biggest challenge is not building support, but creating urgency and making the case for acting now. Participants generally saw value in both initiatives, but struggled to prioritize them relative to more immediate concerns such as affordability, housing, healthcare, and homelessness. They expressed a sense of uncertainty about the future and general feeling that there are too many problems and not enough resources. Since benefits were perceived to be more long term, it was harder to make the case that we need to invest now.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

3

Building urgency requires helping residents see the value of investing now rather than later to avoid the cost of inaction.

Participants often weighed the cost of investing today against the cost of inaction in the future. They were more supportive of investing today when it seemed like it would prevent larger costs and consequences down the road. However, there is a tension with the uncertainty of the future - investments that felt hypothetical, distant, or difficult to connect to present-day needs were more likely to be deprioritized.

4

Emergency preparedness emerged as the strongest entry point for building support and generating urgency to invest in climate-related municipal initiatives.

Across all six groups, emergency preparedness was the only message that consistently outperformed alternatives across all groups. Participants viewed it as relevant, believable, and broadly beneficial because it connected investment decisions today with protection from future disruptions and uncertainty. Many participants understood the need to act now to protect ourselves for both the near and more distant future.

KEY TAKE- AWAYS

5

Other benefit frames showed promise, but encountered some specific barriers around skepticism and importance. Cost savings resonated because affordability remains top-of-mind, but participants were skeptical of promises that investments would meaningfully reduce costs without stronger proof. Health and comfort benefits were broadly appealing, but were often viewed as desirable improvements rather than essential needs, limiting their ability to create urgency.

6

Despite different perspectives and priorities, there was more consensus than disagreement across groups. Participants generally preferred the same initiative, found the same messages most compelling, and arrived at similar conclusions. Reactions were similar across Ontario and BC. The differences emerged in how different segments thought about the issues and contexts. Progressive Activists focused more on fairness/equity and climate, Civic Nationals prioritized evidence and value for money, and Centrist Liberals emphasized practical community benefits. These differences suggest that while a common narrative can resonate broadly, supporting messages may need to be tailored to different audiences.

Part 2:

Municipal priorities

Understanding the context - public mindsets and top of mind local issues.

Municipal priorities

Top of mind issues

Affordability dominates public thinking about local issues.

Housing affordability and cost of living were the most commonly mentioned issues.

Starting the discussion with top-of-mind issues validated that affordability is top of mind, but also helped establish the context for the discussion. The broader cost of everyday life is something people are often reminded of so affordability was often raised before issues related to climate, the environment, or municipal services.

When discussing what affordability means to them, participants mentioned:

- Rising housing and rental costs and barriers to home ownership
- Increasing prices for essentials such as groceries, utilities, transportation, and fuel
- Concerns that wages are not keeping pace with inflation and rising costs
- Uncertainty about future financial security and quality of life for younger generations

Concerns about financial pressures and the economy are seen as large complex issues with implications that are felt every day, but also shape future outlook. Participants frequently discussed the growing difficulty of making ends meet and the strain of rising costs across many aspects of daily life. Concerns were similar across segments and locations, but younger participants were more likely to think about their ability to afford houses or reach financial milestones in the future.

Rising cost/affordability concerns reflect broader financial pressures, creating a sense of more uncertainty and less security for the future which has implications for how other issues are viewed - affordability becomes a lens through which they view other priorities.

Top mentions across groups

- 1.Housing affordability / cost of living
- 2.Healthcare and health system pressures
- 3.Homelessness, mental health and addictions
- 4.Infrastructure, transportation and congestion
- 5.Climate impacts and environmental issues

Municipal priorities

Top of mind issues

Housing affordability and rising cost of living were the top mentioned issues across all groups.

“

It's basically become a question of whether housing is even within reach anymore.....

SOURCE: PROGRESSIVE ACTIVIST, BC

“

Daily cost of living with groceries, for example, and just things that you can't avoid paying for... gas, groceries... everything seems to be increasing exponentially.

SOURCE: CENTRIST LIBERAL, BC

“

I definitely agree with housing and cost of living in general... gas prices, groceries and all that. It's getting expensive. So difficult for sure, those day-to-day costs.

SOURCE: CIVIC NATIONAL, ON

Part 3:

Municipal initiatives

Understanding public views on two municipal climate initiatives, without presenting them as climate-focused.

Municipal Initiative 1

Home & Building Initiative

Description shown to participants

Some municipalities are exploring voluntary programs and financial incentives to help residents, landlords, and building owners **improve how homes and buildings use energy for heating and cooling.**

This could include support for upgrades like:

- improving insulation,
- replacing windows,
- sealing drafts, or
- more efficient water heating.

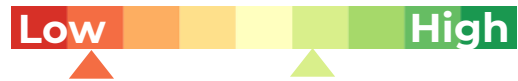
They could also include support for replacing natural gas, oil, or propane systems with electric technologies such as heat pumps.

Home & Building Initiative

Snapshot of Reactions



Relevance



Perceived relevance was mixed, with some thinking they could benefit from a program like this while others felt it wouldn't impact them.



Support



Support was moderate because while the benefits were viewed positively, participants questioned whether household upgrades should be a municipal responsibility.



Urgency



Urgency for investment was low because it felt like a longer-term or 'nice to have' initiative for many participants.

Home & Building Initiative

Relevance

Relevance: Mixed

Perceptions about whether the initiative could benefit them personally were mixed and often linked to living situations (i.e. Homeowner vs Renter)

The initiative was generally easy for participants to understand. Many recognized familiar upgrades such as insulation, windows, draft-proofing, and heat pumps and could see how these improvements might reduce energy use, improve comfort, or lower utility bills. These type of upgrades were viewed positively.

However, there were mixed views on whether this type of initiative could benefit them directly. Respondents felt this initiative would be most relevant to homeowners, landlords, and building owners. Several participants noted that relevance depended not only on housing status but also on their ability to afford upgrades or participate in the program. Some participants (often homeowners) had experience participating in similar provincial programs. As a result, homeowners felt it was relevant, but others who rent did not feel this type of initiative would benefit them. This raised questions about who would actually benefit from an initiative like this. Renters, lower-income households, and people unable to make upgrades themselves did not see themselves as likely to benefit from the investment which decreased relevance.

Overall, while many participants could see value in the initiative, they were less likely to view it as broadly relevant to the entire community.

"I feel like it'll reduce costs of utilities... it would improve heating or cooling... therefore need to run your heating or AC less." – Centrist Liberal, ON

"I think right away the consumer's going to feel it. They're going to feel more comfortable in their space." – Centrist Liberal, ON

"It'll probably impact homeowners the most." – Civic National, ON

"It's going to benefit individual homeowners that can afford it and have wanted to make those changes and that see the long-term investment in reduced energy bills over time, but not anybody that simply can't participate." – Progressive Activist, BC

Home & Building Initiative Support

Support: **Moderate**

Although participants generally liked the idea of helping residents improve the efficiency and comfort of their homes, concerns about fairness and questions about whether household improvements are an appropriate use of municipal funds tempered support of the initiative.

Across groups, participants viewed the initiative as practical and beneficial due to the type of upgrades. The idea of lower energy bills and household savings was appealing but they were unsure whether the savings would be substantial enough to justify the investment or whether the financial incentives provided would be enough to make these upgrades affordable.

Support of the initiative was often accompanied by questions about responsibility, fairness, and priority. Some participants questioned whether municipalities should be funding improvements that primarily benefit individual households, while others noted that similar programs already exist through provincial or federal governments. Participants also wanted reassurance that any incentives would provide meaningful benefits and be accessible to those who need them most.

As a result, despite the generally positive reaction to the initiative, participants felt it was more individualistic and therefore did not feel it should be a top municipal priority, especially compared to initiatives that provide broader community-wide benefits. What held support back largely revolved around perceptions of fairness - benefits not equally shared, renters or lower-income individuals may be left out, and questions about municipal responsibility.

*"The goals and outcomes are sensible... They're climate proofing... We should be pursuing that. But the mechanism of having individual municipalities do this, I'm not convinced of that need." —
Progressive Activist, BC.*

"It kind of strikes me as a cost-effective measure... they're investing a little bit of money now to help people with infrastructure instead of later on at a later date." – Centrist Liberal, BC

"There are some good benefits from doing these types of changes, but it's a little bit more limited in terms of the scope or the impact that it can have." – Progressive Activist, BC

*"We want to see something much more larger that's going to be more effective than just an individual." –
Progressive Activist*

Home & Building Initiative

Urgency

Urgency: Low

Participants viewed the initiative as funding good improvements, but not as an immediate municipal priority.

Many participants felt the initiative could deliver meaningful benefits over time through more efficient homes, improved comfort, lower energy use, and potentially lower household costs. However, they felt the impact of a program like this would be more limited. They were unsure how long it would take to realize any cost savings and felt the benefits would be concentrated among homeowners or those who could already afford the upgrades. As a result, the initiative was often viewed as something municipalities should consider pursuing, but not necessarily ahead of more pressing community needs. They saw a greater need for municipalities to focus more urgently on initiatives that could benefit communities as a whole.

Overall, the Home & Building Initiative was generally viewed as a potentially beneficial investment, but one that primarily benefits individual households. Concerns about fairness, accessibility, and who benefits prevented many participants from viewing it as a high-priority municipal investment.

"It doesn't seem like it's going to have an impact on your current utilities... This is something that's done over time." – Civic National, ON

I'd say it's more nice to have because I just don't know how much of the population can make use of it." – Progressive Activist, BC

I just think it's something that people like homeowners and whatnot, they should just do it. You shouldn't need to have this incentive and this financial motivation." Civic National

"There are probably 100 other more important priorities." Civic National

Home & Building Initiative

Segment Analysis

Reactions were broadly similar across Ontario and BC, and segments came to similar conclusions but there were some nuances in how they talked about this initiative.

Progressive Activists	Civic Nationals	Centrist Liberals
Most supportive overall • Quickly understood the benefits and supportive of improving energy efficiency • More likely to connect the initiative to broader climate, sustainability, and resilience goals. • Less discussion on whether the initiative was worthwhile and more focus on equity and accessibility (e.g., renters, lower-income households, and who gets left out). • Still saw climate as an additional benefit	Most focused on implementation • Generally supportive of the initiative, but more skeptical than other segments and more likely to question whether municipalities should be responsible for programs of this nature • Interested in practical outcomes and focused on whether the initiative would work and if benefits justify the investment • Less discussion of climate, more discussion on costs, outcomes, and implementation	Most focused on household benefits • Generally positive toward the initiative and saw it as a practical way to reduce energy use and potentially lower household bills. • More likely than Civic Nationals to focus on the direct benefits residents could experience, particularly comfort, efficiency, and financial savings. • Less focused on government responsibility or climate change

Home & Building Initiative Summary

Participants viewed the initiative positively, but saw it primarily as a household-level investment rather than a pressing community priority.

Why people supported it

- Improves homes
- Increases comfort in people's homes
- Reduces energy use (more energy efficient)
- May lower household costs
- Feels practical and tangible

What held back support

- Lack of fairness - benefits not equally shared
- Renters may be left out
- Uncertainty about cost savings
- Questions about municipal responsibility
- Lower sense of urgency than other community issues

Municipal Initiative 2

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Description shown to participants

Municipalities would invest in upgrades to public buildings, local infrastructure, and community spaces.

For example:

- upgrading stormwater systems to handle heavier rainfall,
- expanding cooling centers during heat waves,
- improving air filtration in public buildings,
- or adding trees and shade to reduce extreme heat in neighbourhoods.

These upgrades are aimed at improving how public spaces use energy for heating and cooling.

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Snapshot of Reactions



Relevance



Perceived relevance was high because participants saw this initiative as something that benefits everyone in the community.



Support



Support was high because investing in an initiative like this aligns with what participants think municipalities should be doing.



Urgency



Perceived urgency is mixed, ranging from moderate to high because participants connect it to real challenges but associate it with future benefits and feel municipalities should already be doing this kind of work.

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Relevance

Relevance: High

Participants saw a clear need for investments that protect communities and improve public spaces. They felt like anyone would benefit from these investments, including themselves, which made this initiative feel broadly relevant.

Participants easily understood the purpose of investments such as upgrading stormwater systems, expanding cooling centres, improving air filtration in public buildings, and increasing access to trees and shade. Many connected these investments to challenges they already experience or observe, including extreme heat, flooding, aging infrastructure, and inadequate public spaces. Participants frequently described benefits such as protecting residents from extreme weather, creating more comfortable public spaces, improving access to community amenities, protecting residents during extreme weather, and making neighbourhoods more enjoyable places to spend time.

Unlike the Home & Building Initiative, participants did not struggle to identify who would benefit. Benefits were seen as broadly shared across the community, including families, seniors, vulnerable populations, homeowners, renters, and future residents. The initiative was often viewed as improving the overall quality, resilience, and functionality of communities rather than providing advantages to a limited group of people. As a result, relevance was consistently high across segments and regions.

"This has a bigger impact... every single community member will benefit completely from it." – Civic National, ON

"It sounds like a community initiative and it'll just benefit everybody." – Civic National, ON

"When summer is here, you want to feel you're able to go outside, enjoy yourself, be able to build a community, have fun, get involved in activities.." – Centrist Liberal,

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Support

Support: High

Participants viewed the initiative as a legitimate and appropriate use of municipal resources because it aligns closely with what they believe municipalities should already be doing.

Support for the Public Infrastructure Initiative was consistently stronger than support for the Home & Building Initiative. Investing in improved stormwater systems, cooling centers, air filtration, and increased tree cover was seen to align with municipal responsibilities and what residents expect of their municipalities. Participants liked that this initiative focused more on maintaining infrastructure, protecting residents, and improving public spaces as opposed to individual homes. Several participants remarked that these activities should already be part of a municipality's role rather than a new area of focus. Support for planting more trees was particularly strong across groups.

Participants were also more comfortable with public dollars being used for investments that benefit entire communities rather than a limited group of residents. Because the benefits were widely shared, concerns about fairness, accessibility, and value for money were less common than they were for the Home & Building Initiative. Instead, participants often viewed these investments as a more appropriate and effective use of municipal resources.

Overall, support was strong because participants viewed the initiative as both broadly beneficial and closely aligned with municipal responsibilities. Rather than asking whether municipalities should be doing this work, many assumed they already should be.

"It feels like a more effective use of tax dollars." — Civic National, ON.

"I think this initiative should be a default of every municipal government. It's their responsibility." — Civic National, ON.

"I do see this as having the potential to have broader community benefit... adding trees and shade are evidence-based and have been proven to have a lot of benefits, especially for vulnerable people." — Centrist Liberal, BC

"We're working on spaces that lots of people have access to." — Progressive Activist, ON

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Urgency

Urgency: Mixed

Participants viewed the initiative as necessary, but benefits were often seen as preventative and longer-term in nature.

Many participants connected investments in stormwater systems, cooling centres, air filtration, and green spaces to challenges communities are already facing, including extreme heat, flooding, aging infrastructure, and changing weather patterns. Participants frequently felt municipalities should be investing in these types of projects to protect communities and avoid larger problems in the future.

At the same time, perceived urgency was mixed and differed by segments. Some participants felt the rationale for certain investments relied on climate risks or future challenges that had not been clearly connected to their own communities. Urgency was somewhat tempered because many of the benefits were viewed as preventative rather than immediate. Participants often discussed preparing for future challenges, improving resilience, and avoiding future costs, but were less certain about when or how benefits would be realized. While most agreed these investments were worthwhile and necessary, many still weighed them against more immediate priorities such as housing affordability, healthcare, homelessness, and cost of living pressures. The challenge is that although participants felt the need for investment was real, many of the benefits were viewed through a long-term resilience lens rather than an immediate payoff lens.

"The longer you delay it, the more expensive it'll become eventually." Centrist Liberal, BC

"If you don't fix the infrastructure now, it just gets worse and worse and it crumbles away. So it just makes sense to invest in it now." – Civic National, ON

"I don't disagree with these investments, but I haven't fully been convinced of the problem yet." – Civic National, ON

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Segment Analysis

Progressive Activists	Civic Nationals	Centrist Liberals
Most focused on resilience and community well-being • More likely to connect investments to climate impacts, environmental outcomes, and protecting vulnerable populations. • Saw the initiative as a way to prepare and protect communities and improve resilience against extreme weather events. • Viewed public infrastructure improvements as contributing to healthier, more livable, and sustainable communities.	Most focused on needing evidence of the problem • Generally supportive, but lower perceived urgency. More likely to question how climate risks or infrastructure challenges affect their own communities. • Wanted clearer evidence that proposed investments would have a meaningful impact and help address real local challenges. • Investment considered worthwhile when it prevents future costs, protect infrastructure, and provide benefits to the broader community.	Most focused on community quality of life • Viewed initiative as practical way to improve everyday life and strengthen community connections. • Lower perceived urgency because harder to connect the upgrades to future benefits and resilience. • More likely to discuss benefits such as cooler public spaces, shade, cleaner air, and opportunities for people to spend time outdoors.

Public Infrastructure Initiative

Summary

Participants viewed the initiative as a worthwhile and appropriate municipal investment because benefits were seen as broadly shared across the community.

Why people supported it

- Benefits the entire community, not just a specific group
- Helps prepare communities for heat, flooding, and other future challenges
- Improves public spaces and quality of life
- Makes communities more comfortable, accessible, and enjoyable
- Viewed as a core municipal responsibility
- Seen as a good use of public dollars and public infrastructure investment

What tempered urgency to invest now

- Benefits were often viewed as preventative rather than immediate
- Some participants wanted clearer evidence of how climate impacts affect their local community
- Uncertainty about when benefits would be realized
- Some investments felt more urgent than others
- Continued competition with more immediate priorities such as housing affordability, healthcare, homelessness, and cost-of-living pressures

Municipal Initiatives

Affordability & Trade-offs

How residents think about trade-offs for municipal spending.

Participants often weigh the cost of investing now against the cost of inaction and the costs that might be incurred in the future, down the road.

Reasons to invest now

- Prevent larger costs and problems in the future
- Protect infrastructure before it deteriorates further
- Improve community resilience and preparedness
- Create benefits that are widely shared across the community
- Address visible challenges already affecting residents

Reasons to invest later

- Municipal resources are limited
- Investments compete with housing, healthcare, homelessness, and affordability priorities
- Benefits are not always immediate
- Lack of certainty that future benefits will be accrued - future benefits sometimes felt uncertain or difficult to quantify

Municipal Initiatives

Affordability & Trade-offs

Progressive Activists	Civic Nationals	Centrist Liberals
Most willing to see the value in preventative spending • More likely to argue that municipalities cannot afford to delay action on issues such as extreme heat, infrastructure resilience, and climate impacts. • Viewed investments through a long-term lens, focusing on avoiding future costs and protecting vulnerable populations. • More willing to prioritize future benefits alongside immediate community needs	Most in need of evidence that the investment is necessary • More likely to weigh investments against other pressing priorities and ask whether the problem had been clearly established. They see a difference in spending now on things that are felt everyday vs hypothetical situations. • Wanted stronger evidence that local communities were facing specific risks and that proposed investments would deliver meaningful results. • Focused on whether investments represented an effective use of public resources	Most focused on balancing community benefits with everyday affordability pressures • Generally supportive of investment, but often weighed future benefits against current cost-of-living concerns. • More likely to support investment when benefits were tangible, practical, and easy to visualize. • Focused less on climate impacts and more on quality-of-life improvements and community well-being

Part 4:

Message testing

Understanding how to increase public support for municipal climate initiatives.

Message Testing

Reasons for investing in initiatives now

The following messages (without titles) were shown to participants

Reason 1 – Cost Savings

Upgrading homes, public spaces, and buildings can help make monthly energy bills more manageable and predictable by reducing how much energy is needed for heating and cooling these spaces, helping protect residents from rising and unpredictable energy costs.

Reason 2 – Emergency Preparedness

Upgrading homes, public spaces, and buildings can help protect residents and prepare communities for more extreme weather and energy shocks, including heat, cold, smoke, storms, or power disruptions.

Reason 3 – Health & Comfort

Upgrading homes, public spaces, and buildings can make these spaces more comfortable and healthier to be in — warmer in winter, cooler in summer, less drafty, and better able to handle heat or poor air quality.

Message Testing

Snapshot of Results

Message	Cost Savings	Emergency Preparedness	Health & Comfort
Relevance Message felt personally relevant	Moderate-High	High	Moderate-High
Believable Message claim felt real, believable, and credible	Moderate	High	High
Urgency Message conveyed a sense of urgency to act/invest now	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Compelling Overall message felt compelling as a reason to invest	Somewhat compelling	Most compelling	Least compelling
Target Audience Who the message resonated with	Centrist Liberals and homeowners.; those who see a direct financial benefit.	Strongest and most consistent across all segments and regions. Particularly compelling among Civic Nationals.	Progressive Activists, older participants, and those with personal experience of heat, air quality, or health concerns.

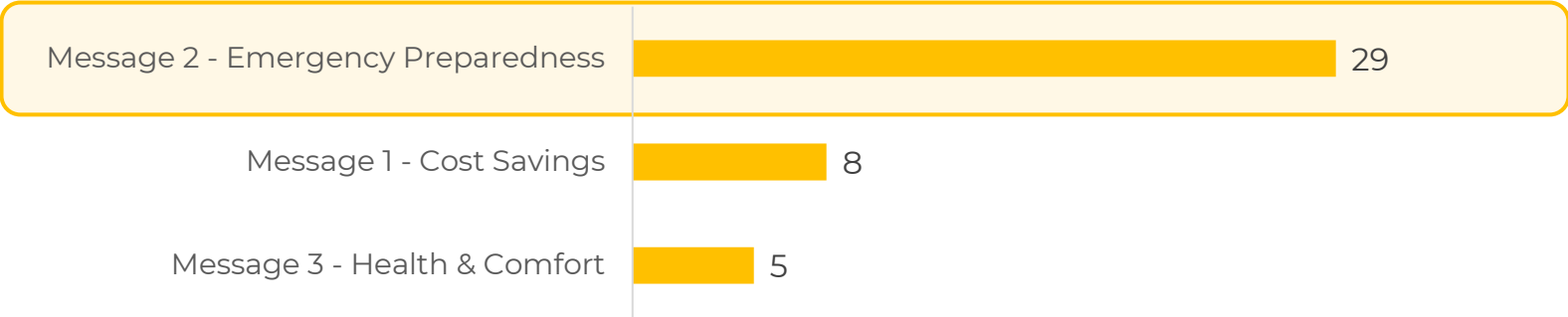
Message Testing

Perceived Effectiveness

Message 2 was the clear winner in all 6 groups.

Emergency preparedness emerged as the most compelling reason for investment across all segments and regions.

Participants were asked to select the message they thought was the most convincing reason for investing in the two municipal initiatives previously discussed. The emergency preparedness message resonated well across all groups and segments. The focus on doing things to prepare against uncertainty connects to the general feeling about increased uncertainty for the future. Participants also saw strong alignment with municipal dollars being invested in initiatives that benefit everyone versus just the individual. Message 2 was the clear winner in all groups, and most preferred among Civic Nationals. Centrist Liberals also preferred emergency preparedness, but cost savings were another important consideration. While Progressive Activists also liked emergency preparedness, they were most open to the other benefit frames (cost savings and health).



Message Testing

Message 1 – Cost Savings

Message created personal relevance but wasn't believable enough.

Participants skeptical about promises of cost savings and felt unsure if they would see a difference in their energy bills in the short-term.

This message aligned well with top-of-mind concerns about cost of living and rising prices, making it immediately relatable and easy to understand. At the same time, many participants questioned how much money people would actually save and whether the savings would be meaningful enough to justify investment. In a context where affordability concerns are already high, some participants viewed promises of future savings with skepticism and wanted more evidence that savings would outweigh upfront costs.

Missing proof points:

Actual dollar amounts, estimated monthly savings, examples of reduced energy bills

The idea of savings was appealing to some (especially homeowners) but they often thought about the trade-off between the upfront cost and the long-term benefit. They were curious about how quickly they would see savings or recover their investment and if the savings would be worth the wait.

Cost savings could be a strong entry point for making investment in climate initiatives feel more relevant or urgent since cost concerns are so top-of-mind, but residents need to see more certainty and proof that savings would be real, significant, and achievable.

"If you can show them, listen, you'll save this much on your bill every month, that's something people could get behind." – Centrist Liberal, ON

Message Testing

Message 2 – Emergency Preparedness

Message the most compelling because it was relevant and believable.

Participants saw preparedness as a practical and broadly beneficial reason for municipal investment.

Participants responded positively to the idea of protecting residents and communities from extreme weather, infrastructure disruptions, and future uncertainty. The rationale felt believable because it connects back to heat waves, wildfires, power outages, and floods - events that people have seen or experienced. Unlike cost savings, which was often viewed through an individual household lens, preparedness was seen as a broader community benefit. Participants connected the message to protecting people, public infrastructure, and local services. The message also aligned with a growing sense of uncertainty about the future, making it feel timely and relevant.

However, the message did not create a strong sense of urgency to invest now. Because preparedness was viewed as a core municipal responsibility, participants often assumed these activities were already underway or should already be happening. While they supported these investments, many still viewed affordability, building housing, health care, and homelessness as more immediate priorities competing for public resources.

Protection and preparedness appear to be powerful entry points because they shift the conversation from climate action to community resilience and shared benefits, which are important in a municipal context – but did not always create a sense of urgency to act now.

“Public buildings, community centres... that's where people go in a disaster. Investing in public infrastructure from an emergency preparedness perspective seems like a good idea to me.” – Centrist Liberal, BC

Message Testing

Message 3 – Health & Comfort

Message was believable but did not create enough urgency.

Participants liked the benefits but did not feel it was compelling enough because the benefits came across as luxuries instead of basic necessities.

Participants generally reacted positively to the health and comfort message. Benefits such as cooler homes, cleaner air, and improved comfort were easy to understand and personally appealing. However, these benefits were often viewed as secondary or ‘nice to have’ rather than essential. Compared with preparedness and cost savings, health and comfort felt more like additional advantages than compelling reasons to make major investments. The message resonated most among participants who were already positively inclined toward climate-related action.

Relevance also varied by life stage and circumstance. Older participants and those with personal experience of heat, smoke, air quality, or health concerns were often more receptive to these benefits than younger participants. Progressive Activists were also more likely than other segments to view health and comfort outcomes as compelling reasons for action.

Health and comfort may work best as reinforcing benefits that strengthen a broader message rather than serving as the primary rationale for investment.

*“If you're not living in what would be considered an ideal temperature situation in your house... you're going to read this and say, yeah, I need to do this.”
Progressive Activist, ON*

“I don't see the immediate benefit because honestly when I'm reading it, I'm like, I can already do that. I can turn up the heat anytime I want. I can make it cooler in my home.” Centrist Liberal, ON

Part 5:

Future Considerations

What do these findings mean for the next phase of the CCR project?

Municipal Climate Initiatives

Future Considerations

Applying the findings to the next phase.

Preparedness emerged as the most compelling and consistent entry point across audiences, but the findings also identified opportunities for further message refinement and testing.

While emergency preparedness resonated because it felt relevant, believable, and broadly beneficial, cost savings and health & comfort benefits also showed potential. Participants wanted stronger proof that savings would be meaningful and achievable, while health and comfort benefits were often viewed as appealing but not essential. Moving forward, message development should focus on making savings more tangible and framing health and comfort benefits as necessities that protect people and communities rather than optional improvements.

Areas for future exploration

- Consider preparedness as a lead message reinforced by affordability, health, and quality-of-life benefits.
- Identify stronger proof points for cost savings, including concrete examples and estimates.
- Explore ways to reframe health and comfort benefits around protection, safety, and well-being rather than comfort alone.
- Explore ways to make the consequences of inaction feel more local, visible, and immediate.
- Tailor supporting benefits to different audience segments while maintaining a common overarching narrative.

Thank you.

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