



CLEAN CITIES
RESEARCH

PHASE 4 FOCUS GROUPS

PRESENTATION

ENVIRONICS
RESEARCH

 **Eco**Analytics



Agenda



INTRODUCTION



METHODOLOGY



KEY INSIGHTS



DISCUSSION

Introduction

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

Equip municipalities
and allies with
messaging strategies
that **build broader**
public support for
local climate initiatives



Phase 4 is the project's final opportunity to **explore, test and refine communications questions** before developing guidance (Phase 5)



Quant (phase 3): tells us **what** resonates

Qual (phase 4): helps us understand **why**, and **how** to communicate effectively around it



PHASE 4 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 framing climate initiatives around other benefits (that connect to top-of-mind issues) rather than climate change itself.
- Reactions to messages intended to build public support for these important initiatives

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

- Focus groups were conducted online via Zoom.
- Each discussion was 90-mins long.
- All 43 focus group participants were recruited from Phase 3 survey respondents.
- Target audiences for these focus groups were the three most climate engaged segments in EcoAnalytics CA-MAP Segmentation.

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.

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 centres 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.

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.

Key Takeaways

What did we learn from these focus groups?

Key Takeaways



Fairness emerged as an important lens through which residents evaluate municipal investments.

Key Takeaways

Reactions to municipal initiatives tested

Participants were more supportive when benefits were perceived to be broadly shared across the community rather than concentrated among individual households

Perceptions of....	Home & Building Initiative	Public Infrastructure
Main benefits	• Energy efficiency, lower energy bills • Home comfort	• Improved/updated infrastructure • Better public spaces • Community resilience/preparedness
Who benefits	• Mostly homeowners, landlords, and those who can afford to do the upgrades	• Entire community
Barriers	• Lack of fairness • Lack of alignment with municipal	• Benefits seen as more long-term • Tied to uncertainty about the future (not all risks felt immediate or certain)
Overall reaction	• Helpful but limited in impact • Considered nice to have but not necessary	• Valuable investment for everyone • What municipalities should be investing in

Key Takeaways

- 2 The biggest challenge is not building support, but creating urgency and making the case for acting now.**

Key Takeaways

Urgency lags behind support

Home & Building Initiative



Public Infrastructure Initiative



Key Takeaways

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

Key Takeaways

Building urgency to invest now

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

Key Takeaways

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

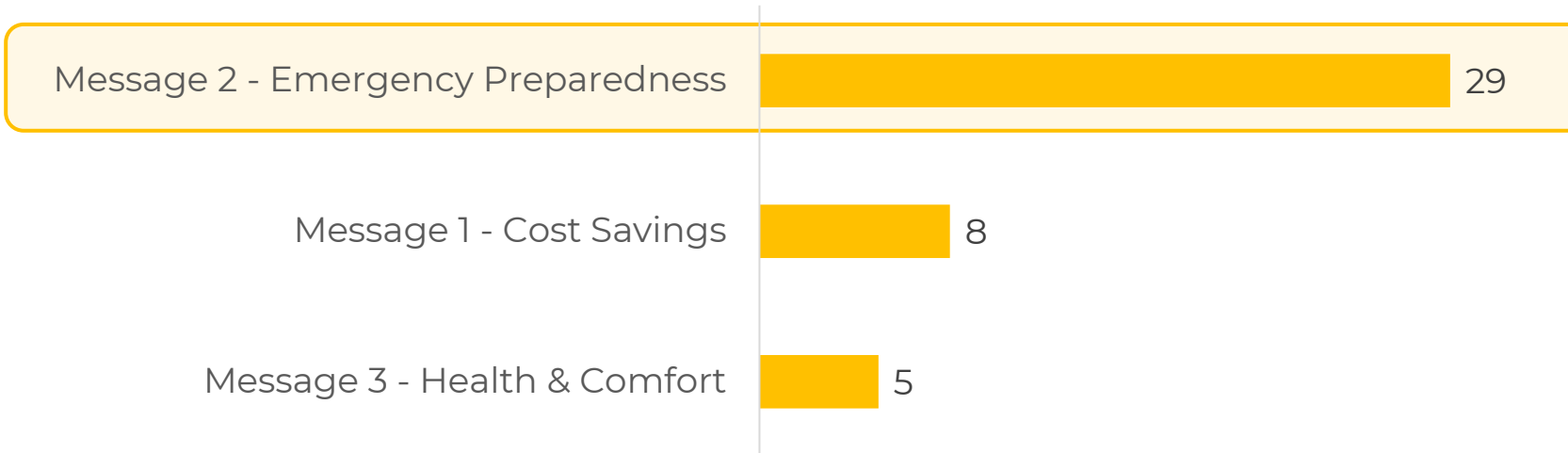
Key Takeaways

Emergency preparedness as a reason to act now

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.

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.



Key Takeaways

Reactions to Emergency Preparedness message

Relevance Message felt personally relevant	High
Believable Message claim felt real, believable, and credible	High
Urgency Message conveyed a sense of urgency to act/invest now	Moderate
Compelling Overall message felt compelling as a reason to invest	Most compelling
Target Audience Who the message resonated with	Strongest and most consistent across all segments and regions. Particularly compelling among Civic Nationals.

Key Takeaways

- 5 Other benefit frames showed promise, but encountered some specific barriers around skepticism and importance.**

Key Takeaways

Reactions to other benefit frames - Cost Savings

Message	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.
Relevance Message felt personally relevant	Moderate-High
Believable Message claim felt real, believable, and credible	Moderate
Urgency Message conveyed a sense of urgency to act/invest now	Moderate
Compelling Overall message felt compelling as a reason to invest	Somewhat compelling
Target Audience Who it resonated with	Centrist Liberals and homeowners.; those who see a direct financial benefit.

Key Takeaways

Reactions to other benefit frames – Health & Comfort

Message	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.
Relevance Message felt personally relevant	Moderate-High
Believable Message claim felt real, believable, and credible	High
Urgency Message conveyed a sense of urgency to act/invest now	Low
Compelling Overall message felt compelling as a reason to invest	Least compelling
Target Audience Who it resonated with	Progressive Activists, older participants, and those with personal experience of heat, air quality, or health concerns.

Key Takeaways



There was more consensus than disagreement across groups.

Key Takeaways

More consensus than not, but still some nuances

What they agreed on:

- ✓ Public Infrastructure initiative seen as more desirable than the Home & Building initiative
- ✓ Value of fairness and community-wide benefits in municipal spending
- ✓ Emergency Preparedness frame is most persuasive

Regional Nuances:

BC

- More mentions of extreme weather events and more likely to feel a sense of urgency

ON

- Greater focus on affordability pressures, household savings, and financial trade-offs.

Segment Nuances:

Progressive Activists

- Most climate-focused, equity-driven, and more receptive to all benefit frames presented

Civic Nationals

- Most skeptical and evidence-oriented

Centrist Liberals

- Least climate focused but still receptive to changes that make their communities a better place to live

Summary of Key Takeaways

- 1** Fairness emerged as an important lens through which residents evaluate municipal investments.
- 2** The biggest challenge is not building support, but creating urgency and making the case for acting now.
- 3** Building urgency requires helping residents see the value of investing now rather than later to avoid the cost of inaction.
- 4** Emergency preparedness emerged as the strongest entry point for building support and generating urgency to invest in climate-related municipal initiatives.
- 5** Other benefit frames showed promise, but encountered some specific barriers around skepticism and importance.
- 6** Despite different perspectives and priorities, there was more consensus than disagreement across groups.

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.

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.

Next Steps

EcoAnalytics will share the report, presentation slides, and recording on their website

EcoAnalytics will complete Phase 2 interviews in early October 2026

ReClimate begins Phase 5 in October 2026 and will be sharing overall guidance in March-April 2027

Questions?

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