



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** General Purposes Committee **Date:** August 24, 2021  
**From:** Peter Russell **File:** 10-6125-01/2020-Vol  
 Director, Sustainability and District Energy 01  
**Re:** **Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit for Low Income Households and their Service Providers**

### Staff Recommendation

That the stakeholder engagement and community activation program outlined in the staff report titled “Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit for Low Income Households and their Service Providers”, dated August 24, 2021, from the Director, Sustainability and District Energy, be endorsed.

Peter Russell, MCIP RPP  
 Director, Sustainability and District Energy  
 (604-276-4130)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
<b>ROUTED TO:</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW</b>	<b>INITIALS:</b> 	<b>APPROVED BY CAO</b> 

## Staff Report

### Origin

Council adopted the Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) in January 2014, which included strategies and actions to achieve citywide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction commitments expressed in Richmond's Official Community Plan (Bylaw 9000). Council endorsed greenhouse gas emission reduction targets within eight Strategic Directions in January 2020 to guide the completion of an updated CEEP in 2021, including a final round of public consultation. The recommended actions within the CEEP support a deeper emission reduction target of 50 per cent below the 2007 levels by 2030, and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

This report outlines a stakeholder engagement and activation program to support low-income households and reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions in alignment with *CEEP Strategy 14: Engage the Community on Climate Action*. The program's purpose is to create a resource toolkit, in collaboration with participating non-profit organizations, to assist low-income households in reducing their energy expenses and reduce community greenhouse gas emissions.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #2 A Sustainable and Environmentally Conscious City:

*Environmentally conscious decision-making that demonstrates leadership in implementing innovative, sustainable practices and supports the City's unique biodiversity and island ecology.*

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #8 An Engaged and Informed Community:

*Ensure that the citizenry of Richmond is well-informed and engaged about City business and decision-making.*

This report also supports Action 6 in the City's Social Development Strategy (2013-2022):

*Support and encourage community-based initiatives that promote independence and reduce the cost of living for low income households (e.g. community gardens, community kitchens, low income resource directory, social enterprises, and community-based life skills workshops).*

### Analysis

#### Energy Poverty in Richmond

Energy poverty is caused by a combination of factors including lack of income, high energy costs and the energy efficiency of the building. Energy poverty is commonly estimated by assessing the budget amount a household spends on fuels and electricity. Low and moderate-

income households that spend more than six per cent of their net income on home energy services<sup>1</sup> are defined as being in energy poverty.

A recent report based on the 2016 census custom tables for energy poverty using household constructs<sup>2</sup>, identified Richmond as having a higher proportion of low-income households living in energy poverty. Recognizing that the data utilized to prepare the report may not present a complete picture of needs within the community, staff sought to better understand the challenges of energy poverty faced by low-income households in Richmond. Staff conducted informational interviews with executive directors from Richmond based non-profit organizations that work directly with residents living on low income. Through these discussions, it was identified that many of the households supported by these organizations exhibit energy poverty issues, (e.g. high home energy and transportation costs) and that the development of an energy poverty reduction toolkit would be beneficial as it would help reduce the cost of living for these community members.

Additionally, residents living on low income were asked two questions related to energy poverty during community engagement for the development of the poverty reduction plan, which will be brought forward to Council in late Fall 2020. Of the 123 residents who participated in the engagement, 69 residents were aware of their monthly home energy costs and 46 of these residents reported spending more than six per cent of their net income on home energy costs. Participants were also asked to identify conditions in their homes that may indicate increased home energy costs (e.g. mold, cold drafts and inadequate heating systems) and 82 respondents indicated one or more of these conditions being present in their homes.

As the preliminary indicators identify the need for the City to continue to engage on this issue, the proposed Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit for Low Income Households and their Service Providers, (“the Toolkit”) will work with non-profit community organizations and residents to determine the specific needs and resources required to help low-income households reduce their energy costs. At the conclusion of the Toolkit program, Richmond will have an engagement model and tools that may continue to be used to engage community members on future initiatives related to social well-being and advancing low-carbon solutions.

### Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit

Staff are proposing to create a Toolkit that focuses on providing resources to reduce the impacts of energy poverty to low-income households and their service providers. The Toolkit will be co-created with non-profit sector leaders to build organizational capacity, as well as identify and understand the types of energy poverty-related resources and incentives needed to support low-income households that they support. Staff expect that the Toolkit will provide clarity on identifying energy poverty, effective ways to engage with low-income households, and a comprehensive set of resources for these households. This project will also give the City insight into retrofit opportunities for existing buildings to reduce carbon emissions per the Community Energy & Emissions update that is underway.

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<sup>1</sup> Energy services defined as the cost to heat, cool and power a home / apartment.

<sup>2</sup> Report prepared by the Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners.

If endorsed, staff will work jointly with Social Capital Strategies to develop the stakeholder engagement and community activation program needed to create the Toolkit. Social Capital Strategies specializes in providing strategic communication services to a range of clients across Canada (and the United States), including: non-profit organizations, government agencies, academic institutions and progressive corporations. The majority of funding needed for this project has been secured by Social Capital Strategies and the Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners (CUSP)<sup>3</sup> to support this program through utility and agency funding from BC Hydro and the Ivey Foundation.

Development of the proposed Toolkit will use a community engagement and activation approach that seeks to build capacity in the non-profit sector and help low-income households take action to lower their energy expenses and reduce carbon emissions. The Toolkit engagement model is based on the City of Boston's Greenovate Leaders Program and the City of Vancouver's Community Climate Leaders Program, also supported by Social Capital Strategies. Boston's Greenovate Leaders Program began in 2017 and was successfully implemented in eight neighborhoods at risk from the impacts of climate change. One-hundred and forty community climate leaders engaged more than 2,000 residents to develop a Toolkit of resources including a dialogue and event planning guide to assist people in flood preparation, renewable energy alternatives, reducing food waste and preparing for climate change impacts such as extreme weather events. Social Capital Strategies and CUSP are also supporting a similar program in Vancouver with appropriate adaptations for their context. Components from each of these programs will be integrated, as appropriate, to facilitate consultation and develop Richmond's Toolkit which will support low-income households experiencing energy poverty.

With successful implementation of the program, Richmond will also have a process framework that can be used for future community-based low-carbon energy initiatives, depending on the outcomes of this project.

### Program Delivery

City staff will manage the Toolkit program jointly with Social Capital Strategies and will support them when engaging local non-profit sector leaders in development of the Toolkit. Table 1 outlines the four phases of this initiative, anticipated to be delivered over a 14-18 month period. Staff plan to issue a call to interested partners to participate in the program from Richmond's established non-profit sector. After interested participants have confirmed their involvement, a series of interviews will be conducted and workshops will be created to develop the Toolkit. If endorsed, staff will issue a single source contract with Social Capital Strategies and initiate the program. Staff will be considering honorariums as to recognize the time, expertise and commitment needed to implement a successful program to boost commitment.

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<sup>3</sup> The CUSP network connects stakeholders and provides added capacity to support collective reach and impact. Members of the CUSP include municipal sustainability practitioners from Canada's 17 leading cities, including the City of Richmond.

**Table 1 - Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit Program Implementation Outline**

<b>Phase and Timeline</b>	<b>Description</b>
Phase 1: Discovery and Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarify objectives and audiences;</li> <li>▪ Interview key stakeholders; and</li> <li>▪ Refine approach based on feedback.</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Develop Toolkit and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tailor engagement materials for the audience; and</li> <li>▪ Produce interview guide for gathering feedback.</li> <li>▪ Develop a draft and final Energy Poverty Toolkit</li> <li>▪ Update Council on outcomes of the project</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Program Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and facilitate training resources non-profit sector for leaders using the Toolkit; and</li> <li>▪ Revise toolkit based on feedback.</li> </ul>
Phase 4: Evaluation and Case Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate the program via surveys and online interviews; and</li> <li>▪ Create a summary report on key outcomes.</li> </ul>

### **Financial Impact**

The total cost to deliver the proposed program is \$97,000. Social Capital Strategies and the Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners Network have secured funding to support this program with \$48,450 from BC Hydro and \$18,550 from the Ivey Foundation. The City's contribution will be \$30,000, which will be funded from the current approved operating budget if endorsed.

### **Conclusion**

Motivating and enabling residents to take their own actions to reduce GHG emissions has been identified in the City's Community Energy and Emissions Plan. The Toolkit initiative described in this report focuses on co-creating tools for organizations with established connections to local households experiencing energy poverty. Staff recommend that the Energy Poverty Reduction Toolkit for Low Income Households and their Service Providers be endorsed. If endorsed, a stakeholder engagement and community activation program will be launched that targets the specific needs for low income households experiencing energy poverty.



Peter Russell, BAsC, MSc, MCIP RPP  
 Director, Sustainability and District Energy  
 (604-276-4130)