

March 22, 2024

Sent via email: michael.white@ubc.ca

Michael White  
Associate Vice-President, UBC Campus + Community Planning  
2210 West Mall  
Vancouver, BC  
V6T 1Z4

**RE: Neighbourhood Climate Action Plan – March 2024 Public Engagement**

Dear Mr. White,

The UNA Board supports the general goals of the Neighbourhood Climate Action Plan (NCAP) currently under consideration. These include decreasing neighbourhood carbon emissions to “net zero” by 2050, redoubling efforts to facilitate active and carbon-free transportation, and safeguarding public health and wellbeing in the face of the escalating climate emergency. The proposed plan comes close to matching climate action efforts in Vancouver and other cities at the leading edge of municipal climate policy.

But UBC can, and should, be more ambitious than that. As the province’s largest public university, with a campus climate action plan that is among the boldest in the world, UBC should be a leader in fostering neighbourhood development that draws on and showcases UBC’s expertise in low-carbon construction techniques, ecologically-sensitive design, and climate-oriented urban planning.

We offer the following feedback, which emphasizes key strengths of the proposed NCAP, as well as areas where we urge UBC to be more ambitious.

**New Construction**

- The UNA Board strongly supports the target of net zero community emissions by 2050 and the plans to transition the Neighbourhood District Energy System (NDES) to low carbon energy sources. We encourage UBC to consider a range of energy sources and technologies for heating and cooling, including electric heat pumps, solar water heating and cooling systems, recapture of waste heat, ground source heat pumps, and emerging technologies that can be “plugged into” existing NDES infrastructure.
- The plan should discourage the installation of natural gas appliances and fireplaces in new buildings.

- The plan should include strong measures to promote mass timber construction, as well as other innovative low-carbon building practices. UBC’s Faculty of Forestry is a global leader in research and training in mass timber and wood hybrid technologies, and UBC’s campus boasts one of the tallest mass timber structures in the world. The neighbourhoods can and should be a “living lab” by incubating expertise and capacity among developers and in the building trades. This would also support the province’s [Mass Timber Action Plan](#), which aims to “catalyze construction sector innovation” by promoting BC materials, expertise, and technologies in pursuit of climate mitigation and adaptation. Through coordination and regulation of development projects, UBC can also encourage off-site fabrication and other construction innovations and efficiencies.

#### Retrofits

- The NCAP’s retrofit strategy should consider possibilities for phasing out natural gas heating, stoves, and fireplaces in existing buildings by 2050. We recognize that building retrofits take time and come with considerable costs. The NCAP should include a combination of regulation of system upgrades, pilot projects and education involving low-carbon technologies, and a strategy for attracting federal and provincial subsidies for low-carbon retrofits.
- The NCAP should encourage UBC Properties Trust to pilot low-carbon retrofits in their existing rental housing stock. At the same time, UBC Properties Trust should also work on retrofitting their existing buildings to meet current standards of accessibility and climate resilience.
- Though we see the advantage of adding older buildings to existing NDES infrastructure, the NCAP should also explore decentralized alternatives for low carbon heating and cooling, including heat pumps, solar water heating systems, green roofs, ground source heat pumps, and other emerging technologies.

#### Transportation

- The UNA Board strongly supports measures to enhance active transportation in the neighbourhoods and to connect them more safely and reliably with the UBC campus. As residents have insistently noted for quite some time, this is both an active transportation and a safety issue. These measures should include separated lanes for active transportation and safer crossings of arterial roads like 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, for bikes, scooters, and pedestrians alike.
- A major factor in transportation emissions is the distance between where people live and where they work and study. UBC is uniquely positioned to drive down transportation emissions by increasing the proportion of households with residents who work or study at the university. The UBC Land Use Plan “aspires” to a target of at least 50% of households with UBC-affiliated residents, but the current proportion falls well short of that goal. The NCAP should reinforce efforts to achieve the 50% target for UBC affiliates, as well as promote residential

opportunities for non-UBC local employees (such as grocery-store employees, child-care workers, schoolteachers, et al.).

#### Waste and Water

- The UNA Board strongly supports proposals to enhance neighbourhood recycling, to promote sharing opportunities for reducing consumption, and to tie conservation and sustainability programs to broader efforts to build community in the neighbourhoods.
- Climate change and population growth pose a growing threat to our region's water supply, and the NCAP should include specific measures to monitor and reduce water use in the neighbourhoods. These should include a transition to individual metering in residential housing, water efficiency requirements for new construction, support for water-saving retrofits in existing buildings, encouragement of water-smart landscape design, and research/develop ways to reuse and recycle water systemwide.

#### Ecology

- The UNA Board supports plans to document the benefits that ecosystems and tree cover provide to campus neighbourhoods. However, opportunities to “increase biodiversity and ecosystem services at the site scale” should be expanded to acknowledge that campus ecological systems are interconnected and that climate actions on individual sites will only be successful when combined with effective neighbourhood and campuswide ecological plans and actions.
- The NCAP's ecological targets should be specific, measurable, and achievable as much as possible. The draft plan currently mentions the development of targets for shading and rainwater management, which we support. There should be similar targets for other ecological actions, like climate-resilient plantings and sustainable landscaping practices.
- Bird-friendly design should be mandatory for all new developments and encouraged in all existing buildings. UBC researchers have developed detailed bird-friendly design guidelines for new buildings and retrofits. This is another “living lab” opportunity for the neighbourhoods.
- NCAP should seek to inform and empower campus residents to take individual and communal actions to increase the climate-resilience of their neighbourhood ecosystems. This could include supporting resident-led ecology projects that contribute to both ecological and social resilience in the neighbourhoods.

#### Climate Preparedness

- We strongly support the NCAP's emphasis on emergency response planning and education, including coordinating local, regional, and provincial FireSmart efforts to prevent and respond effectively to wildfires.

In sum, the UNA Board supports the principles and goals of the NCAP, but we urge UBC to be bolder, more supportive of innovation, and more insistent that the neighbourhoods be leaders in climate-responsible development. As the sole landowner and master developer of the neighbourhoods, UBC also owns the climate responsibilities and opportunities inherent in that land. The NCAP is the University's chance to take full responsibility for their climate impacts and seize those opportunities for climate leadership.

Sincerely,



Richard Watson  
Chair  
University Neighbourhoods Association

CC: Chris Fay, UBC Campus + Community Planning, Director, Planning and Design  
UNA Board of Directors  
Paul Thorkelsson, UNA Chief Administrative Officer