

WE THE UNDERSIGNED DECLARE THAT:

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a once-in-a-lifetime responsibility to accelerate the change we require in Canadian cities. With a coordinated effort by the federal government, provinces, and cities, we can repair a half-century of unsustainable planning that has compromised our health, access to housing, the quality of our air and water, and the long-term financial viability of our cities. Within this short window, we can position Canadian cities to thrive as we embrace a “new normal” and a better “business-as-usual.” A greener, cleaner, decarbonized economy begins with our cities. To get there, we must change the way we plan and operate them. And it is within the power of our political leaders to do so.

To be clear, the measures outlined in the declaration should be considered a starting point for affecting the type of change we need in our cities, but are not a cure-all. Our current urban form has detrimental effects on new Canadians, Indigenous people, racialized populations, and lower-income workers. These groups have disproportionately suffered from the effects of homelessness and gentrification, growing racial- and class-based segregation of neighbourhoods within cities, the social and financial costs of long commutes, and disproportionate rates of working poverty in Canadian cities. To ensure that the structural trends afflicting our cities are not exacerbated or ignored, it will be critical to apply an authentic equity lens throughout the planning and implementation of these measures, include and empower all voices, and to employ population-specific interventions with more universal policy solutions.

We note also that cities are in a period of unprecedented financial uncertainty. While some of the commitments below will require a response from, and coordination with, provincial and federal governments for funding, the majority of these recommendations require simply a reallocation of resources and a reassessment of priorities — away from unsustainable, inequitable, costly approaches that are not viable over the long-term — toward sustainable, cost-efficient, future-oriented approaches. In most instances, the required policy changes can be initiated immediately by municipalities, though implementation periods will vary.

Ensuring the Responsible Use of Land:

1. Update zoning policies to allow more households to access existing neighbourhoods by permitting and encouraging appropriately scaled multi-tenanted housing, co-housing, laneway housing, and other forms of “gentle density” to be built, as-of-right, alongside houses in low-rise residential neighbourhoods.
2. Commit to the creation of 15-minute neighbourhoods in which it is possible to live, work, shop, and age in place by among other things permitting corner stores, local retail, and live-work housing, and adding more local parks and universally designed amenities to include ageing populations and the quarter of Canadians who have a disability so that they too can participate in their community.
3. Restrict short-term rentals to ensure that rental homes are not once again removed from the rental market post-COVID-19.
4. Remove all mandatory minimum parking requirements for any new building.
5. Prioritize the use of existing municipally-owned land and public funding to create affordable and accessible housing that incorporates universal design principles, remains affordable in perpetuity, and enables strategic public green space that supports increased density.
6. Enact stronger restrictions on urban sprawl, including moratoria limiting additional, auto-dependent, suburban sprawl developments.

Accelerating the Decarbonization of our Transportation Systems:

7. Prioritize the transformation of existing streets and roadways for active transportation — both for the immediate, post-pandemic recovery period and as permanent measures — by adding additional space that meets the needs of pedestrians, individuals with mobility challenges such as the elderly and people with disabilities, and cyclists. This can be accomplished by incorporating protected bike lanes and the principles of universal design into a contiguous “everywhere-to-everywhere” network that makes cycling a safe mobility choice for people of all ages and abilities and every resident, in every neighbourhood.
8. Enhance transit service levels, recognizing that interim social distancing requirements will demand high levels of accessible public transit service on existing routes, since passenger limits on buses, streetcars, and subways will be required.
9. On major arterial roadways, transform curbside lanes to dedicated Bus Rapid Transit Priority Lanes, to offer a higher level of accessible service and to incentivize public transit usage as economies transition to normal.
10. Enact a moratorium on the construction and reconstruction of urban expressways, including those in process.
11. Enact congestion pricing policies, and dedicate 100% of the revenues to public transportation expansion.
12. Mandate a conversion timetable stipulating that 100% of taxi and ride-sharing vehicles will be electric.
13. Commit to making public bus fleets fully accessible and electrified.
14. Require all public sector vehicular fleets to be fully electrified (this can be achieved through a mass joint [Climate Mayors Purchasing Collective](#)) and, where possible, accessible.

Embracing Sustainability in our Built and Natural Environments:

15. End the dumping of untreated sewage outflows into lakes, streams, and waterways.
16. Enact a funded, detailed plan to achieve a 40% urban tree canopy.
17. Adopt universal design principles to ensure everyone — including an aging population and the quarter of Canadians who have a disability — can participate in their community.
18. Ensure 100% of municipal operations are powered by clean energy sources.
19. Require that all new government-owned buildings (federal, provincial, and municipal) achieve Net Zero Energy performance, and revise building codes to set higher energy efficiency and emissions standards that also incorporate the principles of universal design so that they are constructed in a manner that is accessible and inclusive, and will promote a diversified workforce.
20. Mandate a conversion timetable stipulation that all new large office buildings be emissions-free.

We cannot return to the old normal, when we already faced massive challenges and urgent crises. This declaration should be considered a starting point: a series of clear and distinct actions that Canadian municipalities can take right now to address the sustainability, mobility, and equity issues that the pandemic has highlighted.