

Green Resilience Project Community Summary Report

Community Partner name: Conservation Council of New Brunswick

Conversation date: 19 January 2022

1. Introduction

A. Summary

The Fredericton, NB Green Resilience conversation emphasized the opportunity to respond to climate change by improving food and income security, housing affordability and energy efficiency, and ensuring community input into decision-making. The participants were unanimous that solving climate change requires Fredericton and the country transition to a “care economy.” That is, transitioning from an economy driven by individualism and the profit motive to one that ensures everyone has the resources they need to thrive.

The most significant solution proposed, and that had popular appeal among the participants, was a universal basic income of around \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month. Other recommendations focused on need: community gardens and food sharing programs, farm to table initiatives, affordable housing and increased protections for tenants, energy efficiency retrofits to reduce costs and carbon emissions, indigenous reconciliation, and more streamlined community consultations at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Participants believe we have a shared responsibility to take action to protect the more vulnerable in society and to reduce future harm caused by climate change.

B. About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community’s conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will produce a similar report. In April 2022. The Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

The Green Resilience Project is generously funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The Project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenu de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts and local partners.

C. About the Community Partner organization

The [Conservation Council of New Brunswick](#) (CCNB), based in Fredericton, is the province's oldest environmental protection organization. We believe the future of all life depends on bringing human activity in balance with ecological limits. The Conservation Council of New Brunswick is a citizen's action group that creates awareness of environmental problems and advocates solutions through research, education, and interventions. The Green Resilience Project reached out to CCNB to hold a community conversation in New Brunswick. It was opportune timing as much of the work we are undertaking on electricity and climate solutions involves reaching out to social justice advocates such as poverty reduction and affordable housing organizations. As part of the [Atlantic Electricity Vision](#), CCNB promotes solutions to ensure that energy in New Brunswick is affordable, reliable, and sustainable for everyone. The Conservation Council of New Brunswick recognizes how climate change disproportionately affects low-income earners, racialized communities, and people in precarious housing. As such, we have engaged with social justice advocates to learn how we can better support their work and to ensure that climate solutions are just.

D. Why was this community selected to have a conversation?

Fredericton is experiencing the effects of climate change and income insecurity. The effects of climate change are getting worse as demonstrated by once-in-a-lifetime flood two years in a row. Summers are getting hotter and winter weather is unpredictable, often wet, and icy. The combined flooding and drought from heatwaves disrupt local food production and foraging. During the floods of 2018, residents could not pick [fiddleheads](#) due to the contaminants from the unusually high floodwaters. This also disrupts local food production. These climate effects exacerbate already existing income insecurity and social issues.

In addition to climate change, there is existing income inequality – people who are not able to afford the basics to survive. There is an increasing housing accessibility problem in the region, with more people forced to live in tent-cities, not only facing climate effects with little to no shelter but are also more vulnerable to being exposed to the [Covid-19 virus](#). Those who are fortunate to have a roof over their heads also live in fear of rent increases, high power bills due to energy inefficient buildings, and rising food prices. Fredericton is a city that has an older housing stock, especially for low-income earners, that leak heat which forces people to spend more on their electricity bills. While there are [supports](#) for homeowners, there is little recourse for renters to improve efficiency and by extension, [affordability](#). All this to say, that despite the things Fredericton does have going for it – it is important to consider the intersecting ways that climate and income disparities has on its residents.

The community does care about these issues. It is not just conservation organizations like CCNB that talk about climate change, advocates for affordable housing, income security, and social justice have taken up the mantle as these issues intersect. As one example, community gardens operated and maintained by groups like [Greener Village](#), [Hayes Farm](#), and the [Ville Cooperative](#) give residents the opportunity to learn about the connection between how food is produced and climate change. These organizations also help citizens learn how to grow their own food.

E. About the conversation participants

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick had an open call to community members to attend the Green Resilience Conversation. We promoted the open call through frequent social media posts and newsletters as well as through ally organizations such as the [New Brunswick Environmental Network](#) and the [NB Media Co-op](#). We had a good mix of community organizers, activists, and residents. We reached out to local organizations such as the [Tenants' Rights Coalition of NB](#), the [Multicultural Association of Fredericton](#), [Human Development Council](#), [NB Common Front for Social Justice](#), [Sitansisk Wolastogiyik First Nation](#), and [The Greater Fredericton Community Inclusion Network](#).

CCNB is engaged in a concerted effort to connect with social justice organizations to connect efforts to solve climate change, income security, and housing affordability. We invited community leaders and organizers in these areas of concern to the conversation for their insight and expertise. In addition, we also reached out to the Multicultural Association of Fredericton to attend and share the event with their membership. Newcomers are disproportionately residing in precarious housing situations and experience [energy poverty](#).

Participants mostly represented interest groups. Each participant, however, indicated that they personally experienced income insecurity, or that they knew someone who does. Despite the open call and our targeted effort to invite different stakeholders, there was a notable absence of people from BIPOC communities. This outcome reinforces for CCNB the ongoing need to build relationships within these communities. We currently are actively planning for and identifying opportunities to participate in BIPOC events, rather than expecting BIPOC representatives to join us. Our goal is relationship building.

As is often the case, 50 registrations for the conversation generated twenty-two participants. We expected this outcome in terms of numbers, and we remain focused on expanding representation at future events.

F. The Community Conversation

The conversation took place on 19 January 2022 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Due to the health guidelines in Fredericton an in-person event was not possible.

We structured the conversation as suggested by Green Resilience Project staff. The main change included reducing the time allotted to reduce participant fatigue. The opening session covered recommended details, including reviewing key terms and concepts, the links between income inequality and climate change, and potential solutions. The questions for the breakout session remained the same.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive and considered this conversation a good first step in viewing income security and climate change as connected issues. It was also helpful for participants to think about these issues as they relate to Fredericton. As we carry this dialogue into the future, we now have a solid base to build on and have identified key issues because of the breakout sessions.

2. What We Heard

A. How are the changes to our community's environment and economy discussed in the introduction affecting you, your family, or the community as a whole?

Participants reported that changes to the environment and economy are causing a great deal of stress and anxiety. The areas of concern most pertinent to the participants were an increased sense of anxiety due to economic and climate uncertainties, the rising cost of housing, and worsening income and wealth inequality.

Increased sense of anxiety: Participants reported an increased sense of anxiety due to the cost of living and climate change.

- The participants who identified as a parent or guardian expressed great concern for their child's future as the effects of climate change worsen. One participant reported they are not planning to have children because of worsening inequality and climate change.
- Access to food and rapid fluctuations in the price of produce has left participants and the clients they represent uncertain whether they will be able to afford food. The uncertainty in local food systems has affected the mental health of the participants and those close to them that puts a great deal of stress on local communities. They found that the pandemic exposed the fragility in supply chains and wonder how climate change will disrupt food delivery and production. A participant noted, "climate effects in one area of the world can raise the price of food in Fredericton."

Cost of Housing: Another cause of anxiety for participants is the cost of housing. They feel like they cannot keep up with housing prices for either renting or owning. The participants who are already homeowners, likewise, reported anxieties if they were to re-enter the market.

- Participants made reference to the drastic [increases in rent](#) prices for what used to be affordable housing. This is particularly a problem for [seniors](#) who relied on their lower rents and do not have the resources to pay the higher price.
- The anxiety created by the housing crisis and vulnerability of supply chains has participants asking, "even if I am fine today, will I be tomorrow?"
- An energy inefficient housing stock in New Brunswick exacerbates affordability concerns. Many folks find it hard to heat their homes in the winter as their houses and apartments leak heat through poor insulation and old windows and doors, driving up their [power bills](#).

Worsening Income Inequality: Participants in one breakout group felt that worsening income inequality limited their ability to fight climate change as individuals.

- It was consistent throughout the breakout sessions that while people would like to contribute to the fight against climate change as individuals, they find it difficult as "climate smart" choices are often more expensive.
- A participants provided this example, "I can buy an organic apple, but that won't stop companies using pesticides that runoff into local waterways and the community." The participant felt that buying strictly organic produce is not realistic for all members of the community, but the cheaper options are often more harmful to the environment.

B. How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

The participants determined three categories where environmental and economic changes are related. The vulnerability of global supply chains, the rising cost of energy and, government inaction to mitigate future impacts were highlighted as major areas of concerns for the participants.

Vulnerability of Global Supply Chains: Participants were acutely aware of the connection between climate change and economic conditions. The participants highlighted the availability of staple foods as an area of concern as climate impacts affect global food production.

- Participants noted that the pandemic revealed vulnerability in local and global supply chains, as well as how disruptions in food production and transportation can have cascading effects. One participant remarked, “the systems have all been tested and we’re starting to see the gaps,” referring to supply chains and structures governments have in place to help people.
- Another participant likewise commented on the pandemic, “I think what COVID has shown, and continues to show us, that things aren’t equal.” They further elaborated as they felt that the priority was not to ensure the well-being of everyone as “it really does feel like the government leadership, they’re all in cahoots with private entities.”

Effect of Climate Change on Cost of Energy: Participants determined the cost of electricity is influenced by climate change.

- In New Brunswick, the most used form of home heating is electric baseboards. Although, there is an imperative to expand the use of electric heat using recent technologies such as heat pumps to transition off fossil fuels, participants reported that as ratepayers in New Brunswick, they feel the crunch of high electricity bills.
- Residents of New Brunswick experience high power bills in the wintertime due to rising costs of electricity and an energy inefficient housing stock. Loss of heat happens through leaky windows, doors, and poor insulation. New Brunswickers can expect to pay more for electricity throughout every season of the year as summer heat waves intensify, necessitating air conditioners.
- The participants were very aware of the multi-faceted ways that climate change will affect their wallets and standard of living.

Government Leadership: The breakout groups found that government, be they municipal, provincial, or federal are not showing the kind of leadership necessary to plan for worsening climate impacts.

- One participant reported that regions in the world would not be habitable anymore due to climate change, which will displace an unprecedented amount of people. They are a person who works with refugees and feels that there is no plan for climate refugees. They further elaborated, “Canadians are already experiencing a housing and affordability crisis and will not be able to respond to help global displaced populations.”

C. What are some possible solutions to the challenges we have discussed that will help the community respond to climate change and create income security for all community members?

The solutions the participants talked about ranged from small community led initiatives to recommendations for federal policy. Solutions favoured by participants described a “care economy,” that is an economy ensuring everyone has the resources they need to thrive. The solutions provided by the participants address the need for a universal basic income, housing affordability and energy efficiency, food security, and equity in city design. The solutions suggested by the participants will help communities become more resilient by sharing resources and reframing what it means to be part of a community.

Basic Income: One of the more significant solutions proposed was for the implementation of universal basic income of a minimum of \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month. This would ensure that people have their basic needs (food, housing, health) met, which would reduce the barriers to self-actualization. Additionally, participants argued for a minimum wage increase to a living wage, one person lamented the latest minimum wage increase in New Brunswick was “insulting.”

Housing Affordability and Security: The participants proposed solutions to mitigate the high cost of housing and to reduce home energy bills. They argued for legislation on new developments to require low-income units, a cap to yearly rent increases, energy retrofits, and a simplified retrofit application as four solutions to address the rising cost of owning a home.

- A requirement for multi-unit housing developments to have a dedicated percentage of affordable units to help low-income people find suitable housing. Participants argued that new housing will not help improve the housing stock if they are all middle to high income.
- As mentioned above, renters in Fredericton have been subjected to high rent increases, exceeding their budgetary constraints. A solution that could be implemented immediately is a yearly cap to rent increases.
- The loss of heat in Fredericton homes and the anticipated increase of electricity demand necessitates improvements to home energy efficiency. Deep housing retrofits to cut energy costs by 50 per cent or more would help lower energy costs and reduce the amount of fossil fuels used to heat homes.
- Applying for energy retrofit programs is a confusing and often convoluted process. Participants recommended the application process for energy retrofits be simplified and that there should be resources to help seniors and those not familiar with the process. One participant summarized the problem of not having access to these resources succinctly, “things like electric cars and solar panels have really become status symbols, and they shouldn’t be.”

Food Security: Food security is a stressor for the participants, especially as prices rise across the country. Initiatives to improve food production and to make it more accessible will help to build self-sufficiency and community resilience. To this end, the suggestions on how to improve food security in our community were:

- To place an emphasis on local foods instead to relying on fragile supply chains.
- Implement farm-to-community programs to increase supply of regional food and connect residents with local farmers to increase confidence in regional food systems.
- Establish an initiative to encourage backyard gardens, and education programs for both the growing of and cooking foods. One participant relayed what growing their own food means to them, “[Community Gardens] can help some people get a sense of control, in the face of climate change impacts and income insecurity...I can grow potatoes in my backyard, it doesn’t solve my need for potatoes, but it gives me some sense of control.”
- Community gardens can be one of the local initiatives that facilitate community engagement and resilience building among neighbours. Telling stories about people supporting people fosters resilience, focusing on building a culture of connection and care instead of individual resilience.

Equity in City Design: One of the breakout groups discussed the need to reorient the design of the city, from one that prioritises cars to a more human scale.

- Increasing transportation options that are not just single occupant vehicles will work to create greater equity for those who cannot afford to or be able to drive a car.
- Transportation options such a bus, cycling, or simply walking will significantly reduce carbon emissions and air pollution in our city. As one participant summarized, “I organize group bicycle rides, I started in the pandemic, one of the things we’re trying to do is promote active transportation. We get around 30-40 people joining us, and we can still be socially distant. One of the things for me, it’s clear just through organizing these group bicycle rides...when you think about going to access the community kitchen and all the other centres/services that are downtown that serve the vulnerable population, for me, we need to have a sense of urgency and have the political will to build communities that reduce environmental impact.” The participant was referring to the unequal access to community amenities for those who do not own a vehicle.

D. How do you think these solutions can be achieved to build, maintain, or strengthen community resilience? Who is responsible for these changes— individuals, community groups, governments, or a mix?

Government Engagement: Individuals, community, groups, and governments share the responsibility to implement these changes. As one participant remarked, “I firmly believe that the vast majority, if not everyone, would do the right thing if they knew what that right thing was.” There are significant caveats. Government can limit the community’s ability to affect change. Participants reported there are individuals and community groups advocating for and implementing the above solutions but there is little to no government support. One participant who works in the community found “that community groups, government, and businesses operate within silos, and they don’t talk to each other often enough.” They provided the example of how their organization uses the most up-to-date best practices for their profession, but government uses outdated guidelines. This friction created a funding gap for their organization, as they are hesitant to return to an outdated way of doing things.

Another participant expressed a similar frustration for getting funding, “it takes too much energy to battle for these community projects when they should already be available!”

One breakout group discussed in detail the importance of having allies in government, “the best cities I have been to that really implement the solutions we’re talking about are the ones with mayors that really wanted to and had a vision and made things happen.” Conversely, another participant had a different viewpoint, “I don’t want to wait for politicians, I want to create the solutions. Let’s be a success and then replicate.” Many agree, however, that solutions to these issues and new ways of organizing may come from outside of the usual way of doing things, “Leadership is likely, perhaps, to come from a different worldview,” and “we can highlight indigenous ways of knowing and the ways in which indigenous communities can be excluded from policy making and from decision making.”

In addition, there was agreement that there must be more community engagement and direct participation in government. The participants felt that engagement from the city of Fredericton is very superficial. They agreed “there needs to be more structured ways for residents to have inputs into the municipal policy making” and “if you authentically engage the community and empower them, there’s so much they can do.”

3. What We Learned

There was consistent dissatisfaction with how our current political economic system distributes resources and that Government facilitates this, picking winners and losers. In general, the participants pointed to profit motives for things that should be universal rights such as access to healthy food and suitable housing. They want to see an economy that builds up the most vulnerable in our society instead of extracting money and resources from the people who need it most. This central theme informed the recommendations such as universal basic income, affordable housing, energy efficiency upgrades, farm to table and community food programs, and meaningful community engagement. By developing community programs and looking to our neighbours for support, we can build a more resilient city. There must exist strong supports for these initiatives. Hunger, homelessness, and poverty are not innate conditions in society; they are policy choices.

- To what extent do you think your conversation built wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

The participants were in tune with the links between community resilience, income security, and the low-carbon transition. Many of the participants have been lifelong community organizers and have been fighting for the changes discussed during these conversations for decades. The wealth of experience in these breakout groups facilitated a knowledge transfer to younger organizers and community members, me included. In addition, the conversation allowed community advocates in one area to learn where their work aligns with another.

- To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

The participants recognize their role in affecting change and have been working towards the solutions discussed in the breakout groups for much of their careers. What came through this conversation was a general sense of dissatisfaction with the level of action from governments and the structures in place to protect the most vulnerable. It was, at times, cathartic for participants to share their struggles of trying to work with various levels of government. However, there was a recognition that the people who make up government bureaucracies likewise want to help people in vulnerable positions and increase our community's resilience to climate change. This, I believe, reinforces the need for more direct communication between municipal, provincial, and federal governments through meaningful engagement.

- To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

The participants reported that this conversation helped them realize there is a larger committed community that works on these issues. In addition, participants also felt that this was a good learning experience to get ideas from advocates and that they felt more motivated to address these topics in the future. There were also instances at the start of the conversation where participants remarked that they had been meaning to connect with each other.

- To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

The immediate response from participants was overwhelmingly positive and helped reinvigorate a sense of enthusiasm to further the solutions discussed. There was interest in holding more conversations throughout the year so that community activists do not lose sight of each other's work and to reaffirm the connections between community resilience, income

security, and climate change. They felt that more elected representatives should have been present, there was only one city councillor who attended and one MLA who registered but could not attend. I think this conversation has created interest and opened the door to future events along the same lines. In future events, it would be prudent to pressure local officials like city councillors and MLAs to attend and hear from the community.

- In your opinion, based on your expertise and what you heard in the community conversation, what does the community need to do next to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?

Community organizations and residents need to have more of a say in local decision-making. It was a consistent theme across breakout groups that they felt that despite their efforts, local government is not considering solutions. To build resilience, Fredericton must start at the basics and commit to meaningful public engagement. Decision makers have an established path to community resilience and poverty reduction if they are willing to consider it. To that end, there must be an organized commitment to pressure our elected officials with the solutions addressed by the participants. The Conservation Council of New Brunswick intends to further this conservation through our programming and future events. Just as we did with the Green Resilience Project, we will address climate change from a comprehensive approach, engaging all members of the community. There can be no just transition if we leave the more vulnerable members of our community behind.

4. Next steps

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick is connecting with a variety of community stakeholders and social justice groups. Our goal is to build a broad coalition of groups working on social issues such as housing affordability, poverty reduction, racial justice, and food security among others to identify how our work on climate change can support their priorities. As we learned from the Green Resilience Project, climate change intersects with other social issues, especially income security and community resilience. The solutions to climate change, such as energy efficiency retrofits, can have positive impacts for low-income residents.

The participants did not establish any next steps. There was a desire among participants to continue addressing these issues in a holistic way. To that end, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick intends to further this work and continue outreach to stakeholder groups. The ideas generated through the Green Resilience Conversation will help us think more strategically about how to affect change in our community.

Quotation Used

“Even if I am fine today, will I be tomorrow?”

“I can buy an organic apple, but that won’t stop companies using pesticides that runoff into local waterways and the community.”

“The systems have all been tested and we’re starting to see the gaps.”

“I think what COVID has shown, and continues to show us, that things aren’t equal.”

“It really does feel like the government leadership, they’re all in cahoots with private entities.”

“Things like electric cars and solar panels have really become status symbols, and they shouldn’t be.”

“[Community Gardens] can help some people get a sense of control, in the face of climate change impacts and income insecurity...I can grow potatoes in my backyard, it doesn’t solve my need for potatoes, but it gives me some sense of control.”

“If we can walk, bike, or take public transportation to get to wherever we need to go, cars don’t need to be there. But if we design our cities around cars, then all these other forms of transportation are maybe an afterthought.”

“I organize group bicycle rides, I started in the pandemic, one of the things we’re trying to do is promote active transportation. We get around 30-40 people joining us, and we can still be socially distant. One of the things for me, it’s clear just through organizing these group bicycle rides...when you think about going to access the community kitchen and all the other centres/services that are downtown that serve the vulnerable population, for me, we need to have a sense of urgency and have the political will to build communities that reduce environmental impact.”

“I firmly believe that the vast majority, if not everyone, would do the right thing if they knew what that right thing was.”

“It takes too much energy to battle for these community projects when they should already be available!”

“The best cities I have been to that really implement the solutions we’re talking about are the ones with mayors that really wanted to and had a vision and made things happen.”

“Leadership is likely, perhaps, to come from a different worldview.”

“We can highlight indigenous ways of knowing and the ways in which indigenous communities can be excluded from policy making and from decision making.”

“There needs to be more structured ways for residents to have inputs into the municipal policy making.”

“If you authentically engage the community and empower them, there’s so much they can do.”

“That community groups, government, and businesses operate within silos, and they don’t talk to each other often enough.”

“Canadians are already experiencing a housing and affordability crisis and will not be able to respond to help global displaced populations.”

“Climate effects in one area of the world can raise the price of food in Fredericton.”

Conclusion

The Green Resilience Conversation participants identified rising income inequality, disruptions to food supply, anxiety and stress, and the cost of housing as major issues being impacted by climate change. The participants suggested we orient our economic system to one that resembles a “care economy.” In doing so, we ensure the well-being of all members of society and that they have the resources they need to thrive. Solutions provided by the participants ranged from small community initiatives to federal policy recommendations. The participants support a universal basic income program to ensure no one lives in poverty and has their base material needs covered. Furthermore, they put forth recommendations to ensure housing affordability and security. Improving the housing stock by mandating all new developments contain affordable units and implement a cap to yearly rent increases to protect tenants from unexpected rent hikes. Additionally, implementing broad, deep energy efficiency retrofits will lower costs for ratepayers and contribute to the green energy transition. On the local level, initiatives to improve food security such as community gardens, workshops, farm-to-community programs, and encouraging backyard gardens and food sharing will increase resilience and foster community connection. Finally, greater equity in city design to de-centre the automobile as the dominant form of transportation to one that nurtures active transportation and public transit.

The participants found that the biggest obstacle to implementing the necessary solutions is government inaction and a lack of clear communication between decision makers and their communities. The participants called for more direct lines of communication between residents, community groups, and policy makers to bring everyone on the same page and affect change. There is clear support to continue this conversation in addressing the links between income inequality, climate change, and community resilience in Fredericton.