

SCC 2025 (informal) Report to Council:

Submitted by Kacy DeLong



Executive Summary:

Councillors Bell, Oickle, and DeLong attended the Sustainable Communities Conference 2025 which took place from February 11-13th. We each took part in a different study tour, and separate concurrent workshop sessions.

There is a learning hub on the conference website that gives resources and slide decks:

[SCC 2025: Learning Hub | Green Municipal Fund](https://greenmunicipalfund.ca/sustainable-communities-conference/learning-hub?_cldee=bsQAxhAbAz5nkjgtv8vtH9BRr9W7O6W17XF5C8hA7AULrPirWrJMp2ghSeQBk0fQ&recipientid=contact-8e44383b2c0bec1180da005056bc7996-06230c877e1f482b943807e71a3e0105&esid=44e0d143-60f0-ef11-80e8-005056a3e2c0)

https://greenmunicipalfund.ca/sustainable-communities-conference/learning-hub?_cldee=bsQAxhAbAz5nkjgtv8vtH9BRr9W7O6W17XF5C8hA7AULrPirWrJMp2ghSeQBk0fQ&recipientid=contact-8e44383b2c0bec1180da005056bc7996-06230c877e1f482b943807e71a3e0105&esid=44e0d143-60f0-ef11-80e8-005056a3e2c0

Overview:

I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to attend SCC. Carpooling with Councillors Oickle and Bell was a great decision. If I'm honest, I downloaded 10 hours of podcasts as preparation for the trip, which turned out not to be necessary. As C. Bell remarked, some of the best networking of the conference happened during our journey there and back. I've worked with these two for over four years; now I feel like I actually know them.

We arrived in Fredericton and got to work. There were many familiar colleagues there. Abhi Jain, MODL's Sustainability Manager, joined us. From Bridgewater, there were staff and Council reps, along with Mayor Mitchell, who were receiving an award for their work on the Energize Bridgewater project. I saw many other participants from NS municipalities, along with organizations such as Clean Foundation and CLIMAtlantic. The networking opportunities were phenomenal. Municipalities, big and small, from across the country had sent elected members and staff.

The speakers, panels, workshops, and study tours were all very high caliber, from the opening keynote with First Nations writer, reporter, and activist, Tanya Telaga, right to the closing Q&A with reporter Laura Lynch, who's podcast, What on Earth, is a weekly listen for me.

Speaker highlights and key takeaways:

Kate Rogers, the mayor of Fredericton spoke following local First Nations dignitaries. The conference was launched with teachings about real reconciliation and grounding ourselves in the local context of the climate crisis. The Wolastoq/St John River floods are becoming more severe and costly with each passing year.

Keynote: Tanya Telaga, award-winning Investigative journalist at the Toronto Star for 20 years, part of the delegation that finally motivated an apology from Pope Francis for historic wrong committed against Indigenous people of Turtle Island/Canada. She received an invitation to be the journalist who broke the story about the burial of First Nation children at a residential school in Kamloops. She wove a story about the disappearances of her people dating from back when the Hudson's Bay Company was first launched clear through to modern day.

Hon. Erskine-Smith, Minister for Housing, Infrastructure and Communities

Politics south of the border affect us here at the municipal level. One election is all it takes to make the work disappear.

Funding requirements for infrastructure grants is all locked up in climate, so strong climate plans are crucial. Climate-proof builds, don't under build. Focus on natural assets.

Book recommendation: Leadership in a Time of Collapse

Hon. Steven Guilbeault, Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Canada's emissions targets were submitted to UN today. Emissions today are at their lowest point in the past 27 years. Even if we're moving away from a consumer carbon tax, a price on pollution for industrial polluters still key to GHG reduction at national scale. The federal government can't do it alone, need to work with municipalities, improve wastewater, roads, access to services etc.

Federal government very limited in their ability to address land use planning; incentive through CMHC to adopt national building codes.

Silver lining: Seize the opportunities that the climate crisis brings. Current funding available of up to \$1M for projects that protect infrastructure.

For the first time ever, pollution levels are dropping while economic growth is still happening.

Closing Keynote: Laura Lynch, CBC reporter for What on Earth. The key takeaways for her closing address: Tell a story, a personal story. Connect with your voters and understand their stories. Globally, we are breezing past 2 degrees, half a degree past what scientists tell us is habitable. We need to adapt to survive now as opposed to 10 years ago when we still had the option to focus on mitigation. Choose hope over optimism. Hope is something that can be acted upon.

Councillor Submissions:

I've included within this report a section from each of the three councillors who attended. The conference schedule was very full. Between the three of us, we tried to divide and conquer as much as possible. We attended different study tours and concurrent workshops.

Submitted by Councillor Wendy Oickle:

How can we sustainably address systemic challenges such as poverty and homelessness in our communities?

- Invest in development not just relief
- Do things with people not just for people
- Start with strengths not deficits
- Address reasons for the poverty not just the poverty of circumstances
- Help people see they are of value as individuals
- Housing first but not only add services

Study tour - I visited the "12 Neighbor Community" a community of single unit tiny homes. It had a community commercial facility with supportive enterprises as part of the community. Residents are expected to move on but it is not necessary. Rent based on an income formula.

Workshop -Accommodating the Future

- Do public engagement out in the public
- Find out what the communities' vision -values -ideas are for their community
- Working group made up of residents (include youth 14-18, young adults)
- What is needed – not just what the municipality can provide but what is truly needed for the community to thrive and accommodate more residents
- Consider Climate events with the infrastructure of the community and future buildings
- Have a municipal growth strategy plan
- Look at the entire process for permits /development agreements and see how it can be streamlined
- Give advice to developers about the community and their goals and the culture of the community
- Include neighboring municipalities in plans , what are they doing ?, how does it effect you ?, how are you effecting them?
- **Personal thought: what do individual communities see happening by 2040 Remember at age 15 they will be 30 in 2040, anyone 65 will be 80 in 2040)**

Panel Discussion : Collaborative Climate Solutions

Maybe very simple – what do an apartment building of people do if the power goes out another emergency?– Meet in the Lobby- have a muster station , trained residents with info on the next step

- Building communities -Communities need to know each other to support each other , this takes work , meeting , seeing your neighbor, making friends
- Have residents know the protocols for climate event management
- Address energy deficiency
- **Personal thoughts: Address the reason for the problem too cold , too warm , no power, Why are roads flooded : no trees for shade, need for heat pumps (cost} Drilled well, warming and cooling centers, bigger culverts needed, ditches need to be cleaned, etc....**

Workshop -Building the case for Healthy equity in climate adaptation efforts Tools and strategies for resilient communities :

- Involve business in solutions for the community such as cooling / warming areas
- For public information sessions give personal invites not just on social media or radio
- Build communities help them to know each other

- Doctors in Ontario can write prescriptions for landlords to provide services such as air conditioners due to effects of climate event on resident
- Acknowledge the risk factors – housing , transportation, loneliness, food security, energy poverty , language ect....
- Personal thoughts Not to throw out the plans from the previous council because 6 of the present council were on the previous council. They all offered to remain, and they were either acclaimed or elected by the residents. The work they did is relevant and supported by the residents as shown in their re-election.
- Climate will not be ignored

Workshop- Harnessing local resources for community energy solutions .

- Solar or wind – encourage such solutions in various communities. Support companies who what to reach residents with information
- Partner with companies or other municipalities
- Support community centers, churches, fire halls who what to have energy savings refits, solar panels, charging EV stations, drilled wells, with grants
- Having partners will help municipality move forward with energy savings for their communities.

Panel – A new Era of Climate Action

- Build stronger communities- where economic opportunities and cost savings in climate adaptations and resilience are considered rather than GHG reductions
- Projects like Public Transit, bike paths, E bike loans
- Reduce the cost of living, electrical usage and have rebates available through solar, wind or refits
- Tech is not just available for the wealthy but for all with financial support
- Look outside the box for new building to be net zero the tech is there but thinking is not
- Develop Climate action screening tools
- Climate action needs to be in place because it is a health issue, an economic issue, a financial issue
- Climate action is needed because we care about the future

AS I stated above Climate will not be ignored

Submitted by Councillor Martin Bell:

The argument might be why do we really want to have our future projects looked at through a climate change lens? The trend lines of disasters are on the climb every year in the last five years. Climate change is responsible for floods, intense storms, sea level rise, advanced erosion, and wildfires just the name a few. We got to a point where now insurance companies don't want to necessarily insure things that we built and things that we own. We cannot insure our way out of climate change damage. We need to limit damage and prepare infrastructure for the changes that we see now and the changes that we will see coming in future years.

How we live with nature is important. The world around us is always changing. Nature is always changing. It is us that think things stay the same, but we need to ensure our actions and responses stay in pace with change and ahead of climate change. Investing in nature can be a tool to help with mitigation.

Extreme heat is a health impact for humans and the animals in our community. The more we can help to offset heat dangers then we need to act and there's a term that the indigenous people use called "land back" actions like replanting our forests and this can help advance reconciliation as a municipal act by working with the first nations on asking to work with the indigenous people. Even planting native grasses can be a simple move to increase biodiversity. Silver maple trees soak up massive amounts of water and if you want to save wetlands do not fill them in. Wetlands are nature's way of coping with excessive water and rainwater. We need these wetlands now more than ever. We can take wetlands and incorporate them into park properties or protected areas.

Advancing social economic benefits in your community

When doing municipal wide planning you should really think beyond your municipal borders. Think about the forests, think about that river coming through, and think about the wetlands. Energy policy is the first step in sustainability. Climate impacts are what people remember; major floods, ice storms, or wildfires. A lot of communities do not see themselves in a conversation about climate change. We have talked about this for about 10 or more years, but talk does not fix or prepare us so actions that need to be taken and the talking just does not do it. When we speak in groups, start with community, then speak about the municipality. Begin with small talk and expand to climate solutions. One size does not fit at all. Not everyone can drive an EV because of the cost. We can't just think of ourselves because climate change is much bigger.

Many projects or decisions are made by a group of counsellors. Sometimes discussions take years to develop, relying on long-built relationships. Then, suddenly, during elections,

many counsellors may change, disrupting established connections. Don't think that you need to start over. Trust that a change in direction will have impacts, building relationships take years and so don't throw it all away. You sometimes need to be brave enough to go out at the end of the diving board and take that leap of faith.

How do you keep Council focused on the climate emergency amid competing projects seeking attention and funding? Appreciate those who engage. Even though climate projects may not always be the most visible to the community. They will be the ones that overtime long-term will send you back the most benefits.

Building relationships with people from the land should include the indigenous people of the area. This is where you'll get your best input because they are the closest to the land and many have been here generation after generation and have seen the changes firsthand. Citing limited resources as a reason for inaction means nothing will be accomplished. Spending even \$0.20 per dollar/on the dollar on starting a solution can inspire others to contribute more. Anything worth doing is worth starting. Allowing negativity to dominate our mindset hinders advancement. A little action is better than none.

Submitted by Councillor Kacy DeLong:

Day 1:

I kicked off the day with “**Fredericton green buildings tour** – Explored the conference site itself in a *behind the scenes* tour of the Fredericton Convention Centre, a LEED silver certified building. They employ many green practices such as using vegetable oil to lubricate elevators. It is built over the deep well water system below the city, and so they don't use any chemicals they would be mandated to clean if spilled. They have an incredibly energy efficient heating and cooling system. The collect rooftop water to flush toilets.

They incorporate behavioral practices as well, that are intended to reduce waste. One example is their event catering. They put out smaller portions that are replenished as needed. That way, any leftovers are still food-safe and don't need to be thrown out. They work with the local high school to distribute for children in need. These children's families are contacted through summer so that they are still covered in the off season.



Then visited the Grant Harvey Recreation Centre. We got to explore the whole building, its mechanical guts, the electric Zamboni, both the Olympic and NHL size ice surfaces, the walking track with in-floor heating, and they also walked us through their plans to build a pool next door which would benefit from the same heating and cooling system.

There was a lot that was familiar when compared with the Lunenburg County Lifestyle Centre (LCLC), such as the geothermal heating and cooling system. There were other components that were much different, such as their potassium formate brine system as opposed to the chemical system used here. With the brine, they don't need to have a hazardous gas monitoring system. They had a lot of growing pains with sediment and air infiltration which led to the decision to switch to brine after 5 years of fighting with the system. The cost for this along with replacing the pipes was \$750,000. Having also gone on a tour of the LCLC this week



The chief operator, Bruce Good, was knowledgeable and generous with his time. He said that he's been in the industry for 30 years. Bruce said he came onboard with Fredericton 5 years ago and it is the most complex system he's encountered. He gave his contact info should anyone wish to follow up to learn more about the facility. Bruce.good@fredricton.ca



Concurrent workshops:

These sections are all written from the vantage of a listener, they are a synopsis of what was presented.

The Mind and Heart in the Midst of a Climate Crisis

The heart is the piece of the climate discussion that we're missing. How do we keep doing this work if it's costing us so much? Physical symptoms of overwhelm and mental anguish are vast. Driven by passion, crushed by weight. Risk of burnout and paralysis. The climate crisis is also a relational crisis; it should not be polarizing yet has been made to be so by financial interests. How do we cultivate deep discussions, locally, with people with whom we don't see eye to eye?

Advice: Share vulnerability and people may reflect it back to you. Find outlets, practices, art, music, tell the story of climate change and make it personal. This is a marathon. The shortest path to positive action is staying healthy. Stand on grass, take time for movement, breath work. Don't just do these exercises by yourself. Talking more about climate change with everybody is one of our best chances to change our path. Take them with you in your practice of staying grounded and sane.

We engaged in an exercise designed to show us ways to find instant connection with people so you can do stronger work together. By the end, it had most of the room crying. (I'm happy to demonstrate this activity to anybody.)

Day 2:

Building our Collective Future: Partnerships for Equitable Climate Action

Addressing climate action and meeting community-wide goals requires coordinated and inclusive cross-sectoral efforts.

Look outside your boundaries, watersheds don't know municipal boundaries. Building community is building relationships. Welcome newcomers and know your neighbours. HRM panelist: HRM was 5th to sign on to Partners for Climate Protection, lots of historical climate actions such as HalifACT - Acting on climate together. Big tent, engaged all sectors, created inclusive community, youth engagement key.

This work requires you to have different perspectives at the table, diversity of voices, passion is as important as knowledge.

Important takeaway: An implementation plan is **key**, not just strategic plan. Celebrate your region and its actions. Engage with the same people on planning team to implement climate plan.

Especially in rural areas with fewer resources, lean on each other. Once dollar signs start coming up, it's easy to go off track. Aim for progress not perfection, time is short.

In all its policy development, Toronto gives extra weight to projects that reduce GHGs and practices of multi solving adds competitiveness for departments' budgets ie does this budget item solve problems across departments?

Ask the experts: Now what? Building community support for climate action in uncertain times - Presented by Re.Climate

Rising misinformation, organized pushbacks, and shifting political and public priorities are making it increasingly difficult for local governments to implement climate plans and programs.

Climate issues are being pushed out by other concerns. Survey found Canadians still care, just their attention is focused on new emerging crises. It's electeds job to keep focus on the climate crisis while ALSO responding to housing, tariffs, affordability....

Residents are experiencing effects of climate change in real time, there's nonetheless an understanding gap, people think that it is a future problem. It's a now problem. Less than half of Canadians know that burning fossil fuels is driving climate change. If this understanding isn't strengthened, we run the risk of further wedging people on either side of debate when it should no longer be a debate. Currently many Canadians believe climate action is unfair. Carbon pricing misinformation campaign has succeeded, consumer carbon tax is dead. Good example of why we need to help our residents believe and know that climate action is fair.

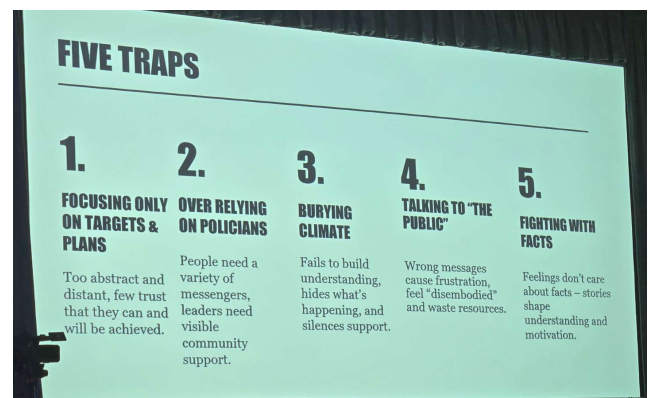
People are witnessing/acknowledging the changes, ie noticing less snow, seeing wilder storms etc. Most important thing we can do is talk. Talk about the climate crisis in our communities, find shared values, for instance gardeners, hunters, fishers all care about nature. Bring people together. This is the pathway to getting projects done.

On trust and communication: People are vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation in this time of media fragmentation, then forming echo chambers and share harmful ideas. We're in a time of declining trust, rising fatalism, and finite attention budgets. Our job is to build people's sense of control, fairness, trust.

Generally, municipalities over-rely on traditional public relations techniques, also assume that if info is put things out on usual channels, people will see it. Not so.

Scientists and environmentalist used to be highly trusted. Now it's close friends and family. Creates an opportunity to bring back focus on community, not online. How do we reinvigorate public spaces?

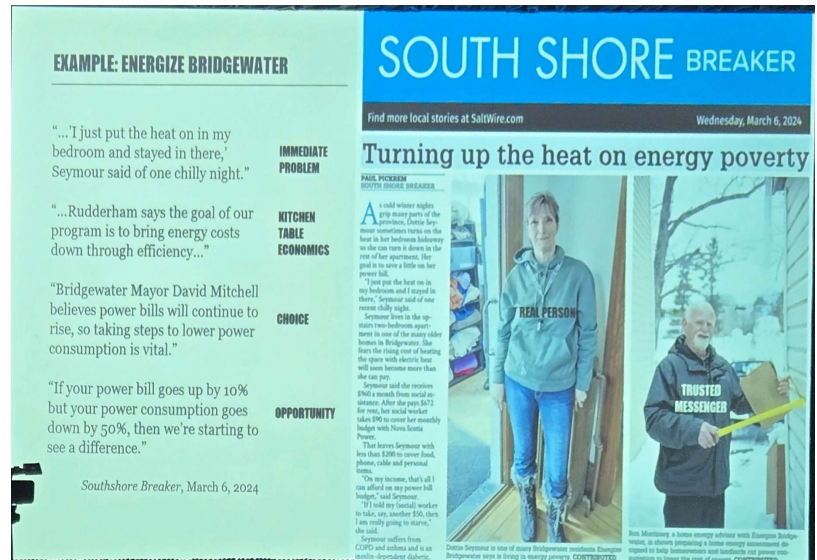
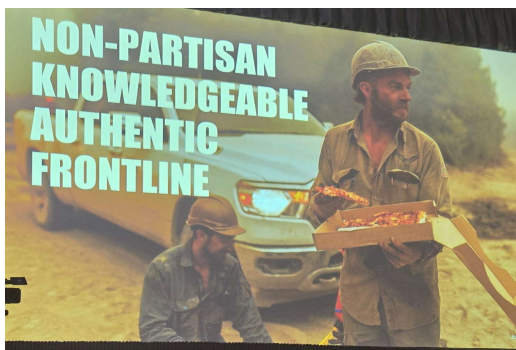
Municipal government is still the most trusted order of government, still ranked lower than friends and family. Suggested that we don't promote municipal gov as gov, more about service providing, close to the people. Residents may not care about the policy as much as who works in the specific departments at the human level. People want to hear from our experts! Frontline message delivery agents, for instance, commercial installers who understand our PACE program can be some of our best storytellers. Engage with construction industry and builders, invest in these relationships.



In our messaging: Focusing on targets can be a mistake. Targets are abstract and conceptual. People may not know what carbon emission targets are or how they apply to their lives. Focus on the now. Policy isn't language. Focus on people. Feelings don't care about facts.

Energize Bridgewater highlighted as great storytelling example.

Don't show a forest fire, show somebody fighting a forest fire.



Can't just put out a press release, we don't live in that world anymore. The people working against climate message are well funded. Pay to have produced content put in people's feeds. But spend only 10% of budget on that. Spend 90% on finding the two people in the community who can fill a room with activated neighbours, then bring them donuts and let them lead. Some municipalities make up Communications Kits with items like topic cards and other goodies to distribute to local communicators. Find ambassadors from a broad spectrum, train them up a little, then send them out in the community to "pre-bunk".

Workshop: Natural Asset Management in Canada

CSA "we don't just approve hockey helmets"

Guidance document from CSA on natural asset and other nature-based solutions:
Managing Flooding and Erosion at the Watershed-Scale

Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal and Riverine Flood and Erosion Risk Management

CSA W234: Watershed-based flood and erosion management using natural and nature-based solutions

Green infrastructure is designed, engineered, made to mimic nature. Natural assets serve many functions to a municipality, but are also act as biodiversity shelters.

Natural asset management needs to be community focused and draw from local voices who understand the significance of the asset. Natural assets are key to managing risks like flooding and erosion, so get nature into financial reporting. Need to pre-emptively map and survey natural service providers.

Day 3:

Panel: Risk and Resilience, Planning for the Impacts of Climate Change

Megan Leslie, CEO of World Wildlife Federation, says “Catastrophes teach us that we need to draw together to protect our communities. We build resilience together.”

The soil and understory in a forest store carbon, absorb flood water. Rich forests, messy natural forests slow down burns and are the best natural service providers. Wildlife populations are on the dramatic decline. If we invest in nature, we also support biodiversity. Municipalities have a key role, engaging with residents and, critically, underserved communities, thereby empowering them. Nature restoration allows us be nature protectors and promoters.

If there are First Nations communities already doing the work in your area, ask how can your municipality support the work.

WWF biodiversity case study example: a municipality planting native grassland species under powerlines, 10x increase in biodiversity. Ripple effect, they did 1 acre, then neighboring town say the mini project and replicated it on 50 acres.

Another case study: Welustuk/St John River, used to be cleared to the edge for farming. Silver maples being replanted, restoration of forest ecosystem. Can soak up incredible amounts of water per hour, more than concrete culverts can move even. WWF is working with Fredericton on this project.

Adaptation projects are often not just reducing risk, they create green spaces, improve air quality, really activate public. Financial disclosures can alter our decision making. Embed this practice in asset management policies.

Final Thoughts:

A 12 page report doesn't capture all we learned and experienced. If you would like any more details on any of the presentations listed above, to see any pictures from slide decks of conference presenters, or to hear more about our thoughts on specific topics covered, please contact:

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