

IMPLEMENTING A FAIR TRANSITION TO 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERVIEWS
WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT RISK OF
BEING DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED
BY CLIMATE CHANGE**

Neighbours United acknowledges we are based out of the traditional land of the Sinixt Peoples and our current staff are working on the lands of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa, and Blackfoot Indigenous Peoples.



Introduction

Right now, 13 local governments in the Kootenay region are committed to transition their community energy to 100% renewable by 2050, this includes heating and cooling, transportation, electricity, and waste management. So far, six of these local governments have adopted The West Kootenay 100% Renewable Energy Plan, which Neighbours United (formerly West Kootenay EcoSociety) facilitated developing with nine local government partners.

Neighbours United conducted interviews with 105 low-income people, racialized, and other community members through autumn 2021 - winter 2022 across the West Kootenay region. Neighbours United aimed to learn about interviewees basic needs, especially housing and transportation, in implementing the 100% renewable energy transition.

Affordable housing and accessible transportation were the top concerns and to build fair and inclusive communities, we need to address these issues in the 100% renewable energy transition.

How residents were interviewed

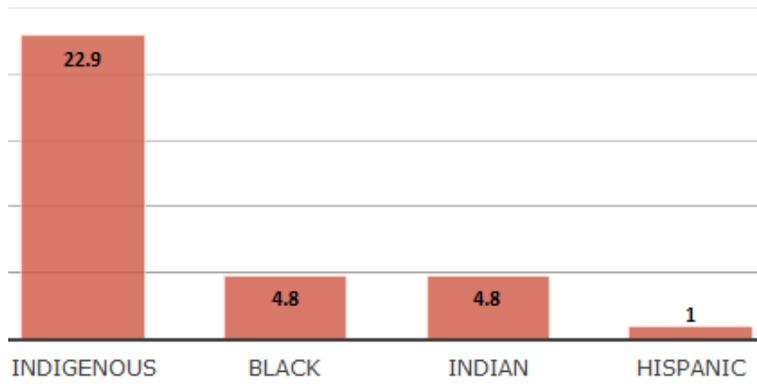
Neighbours United outreach efforts focused on low-income people from the 85 low-income households enrolled in our Farms to Friends program and outreach to regional social service organizations, to access racialized people, people experiencing homelessness, recovering addicts, and other low-income families. We interviewed people from these communities because they are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and their input around climate action and renewable energy transition plans has not been explicitly collected.

Potential interviewees were contacted through email and phone. The one-hour conversations began by getting to know the interviewee and building comfort, asking questions about where they were from, how long they have been living here, their family, their nationality, how comfortable they felt sharing, and how they felt about the Farm to Friends program if they were participants. The interview then transitioned to asking about their housing and transportation needs by asking what proposed solutions in the *West Kootenay 100% Renewable Energy Plan* would support them. The interview completed by asking for contact information Neighbours United could contact interviewees in the future if necessary, and pay them a \$25 honorarium for sharing their time and lived experience.

Which residents are represented in this report?

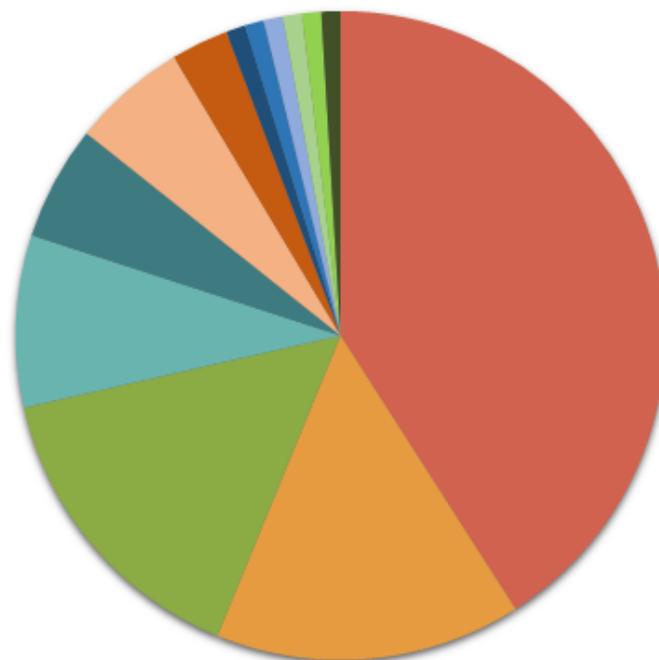
We asked interviewees to self-report their backgrounds and identities to understand the cross-section of residents who are represented in this report.

Percentage of Interviewees who Self-Identified as a Member of a Racialized Group



105 residents interviewed
77.1% are low-income
22.9% are unhoused

Geographic Breakdown of Interviewees



- Nelson (41%)
- Castlegar (15%)
- Trail (15%)
- Salmo (8%)
- Rossland (6%)
- Kaslo (6%)
- North Shore (3%)
- Balfour (1%)
- Fruitvale (1%)
- Genelle (1%)
- Montrose (1%)
- New Denver (1%)
- Winlaw (1%)

Meeting basic needs: key learnings

Many participants desire to be a part of a loving community with friends where they can support their families, however many are struggling to support their families and afford their basic needs.

The cost of living, housing, transportation and food to support families is a growing concern. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, income insecurity has risen, and many have lost their jobs, or sources of income. With many parents forced to live off of savings, they are now finding it a challenge to make sure all the needs of the house are taken care of.

Comfort levels of folks have been affected; some don't feel comfortable leaving the house in fear of getting sick which affects the income and source of food for the home. The majority of participants responded that their wages or income are not meeting their needs or the needs of their family. There is a strong need for more financial stability and a living wage income, particularly for those on disability.

Top concerns and unmet needs

- Housing security and the need for affordable housing, endless waiting lists for housing
- Public transportation
- Price of fuel impacting travel for work, or other necessary travel
- Child care
- Increase in the price of groceries
- The ability to afford what's needed

“I think renewable energy would affect everyone here, our bills would be affected and the environment would be much cleaner... We should think about the health of the people and make changes accordingly.” - Participant

Affordable housing

There was consensus with all participants around the need for communities to find reasonable, affordable, and accessible solutions to housing and transportation with 98% of the interviewees agreeing that affordable housing and renovations should be addressed to meet their basic needs.



Photo credit: Tree Construction

Transportation

94.5% of the interviewees agree that fuel prices should be lowered and different transportation options should be considered, while 36% of the interviewees feel that electric vehicles are not a good idea mostly because of the high barrier cost of purchasing a vehicle. Many folks travel in a personal vehicle for their occupations due to the rural nature and inaccessibility of public transportation.

Participants in Trail, Nelson and Castlegar, the larger West Kootenay communities, felt that public transportation needed to be improved with more routes, stops, and hours. This is especially true on weekends where bus service is severely lacking in the region.



Climate change & community

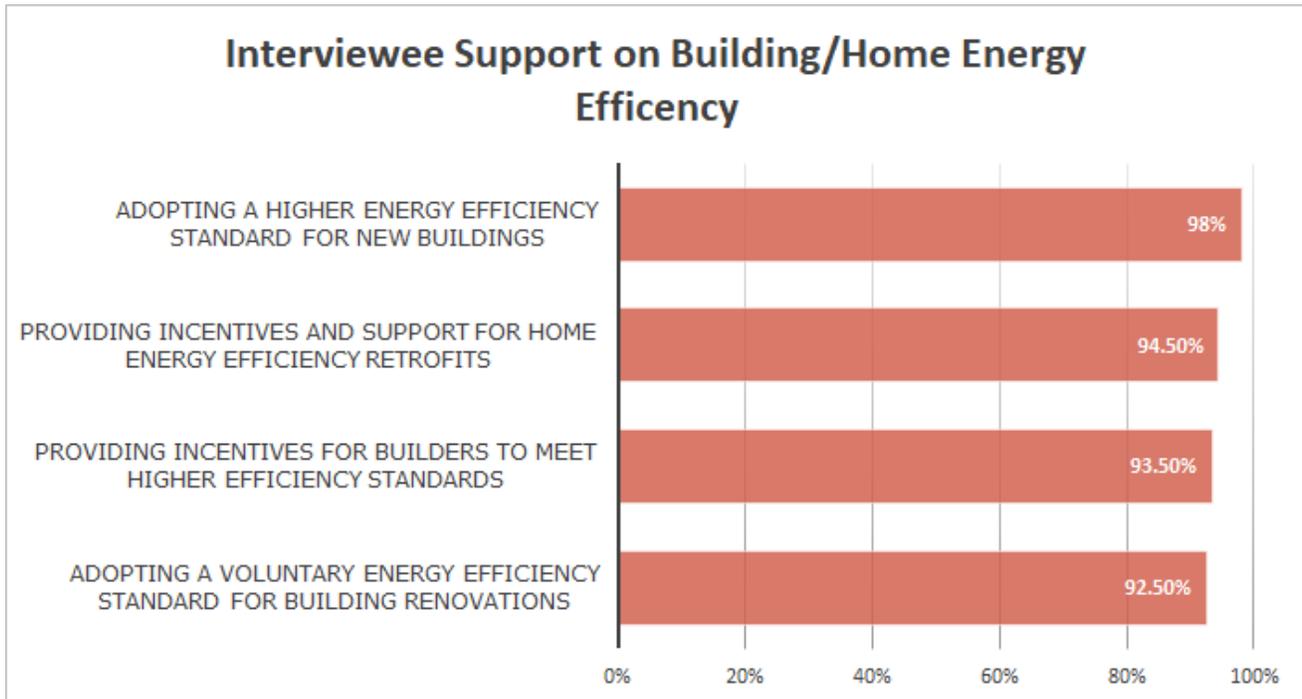
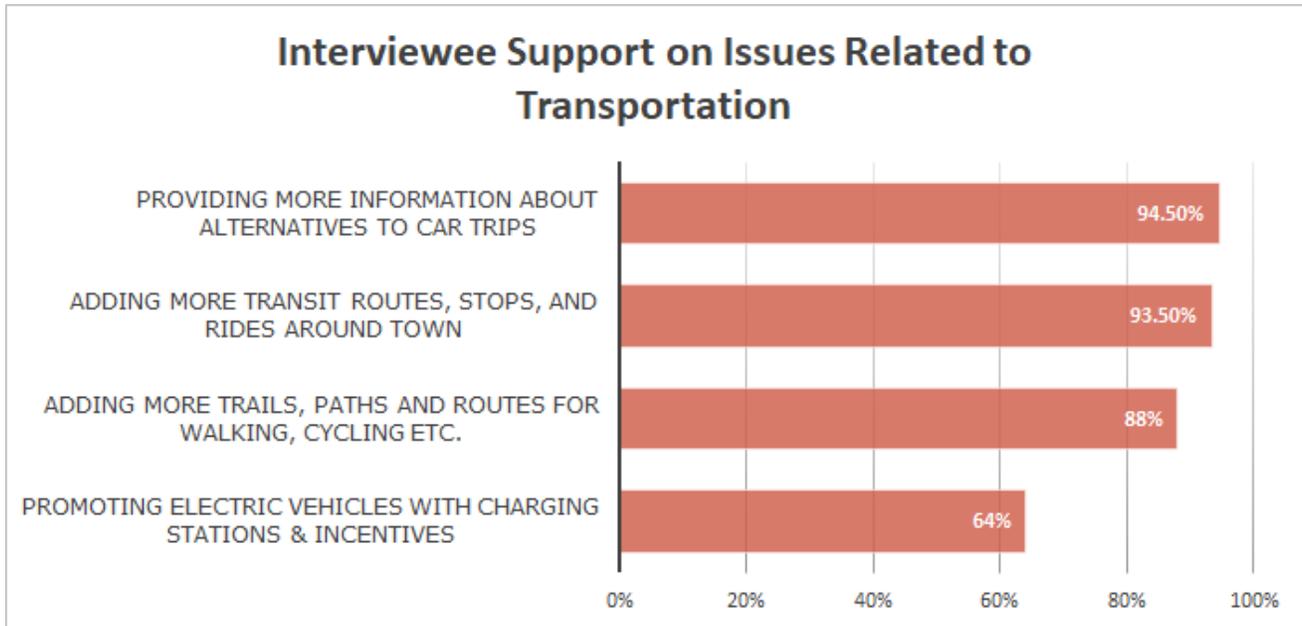
Climate change is showing up as hotter and drier summers, more precipitation during precipitation events, and more rain in the winter instead of snow in the Kootenay region. There were participants who couldn't start or maintain gardens due to the very hot temperatures and forest fires. Smokey days prohibited participants with respiratory problems or other health conditions from spending too much time outside which meant they had to stay in and it affected their mental state as well as their gardens and the ability to grow food for themselves and their families. Many participants feel as though climate change is also impacting their cost of living in their home and in getting around.

“Setting up small community gardens or community kitchens where so many people can help would be great.” - Participant



Dea and Elijah in their garden in Salmo

Interviewee support for proposed solutions from the West Kootenay 100% Renewable Energy Plan



Recommendations

Affordable housing and accessible transportation are top concerns that need to be addressed and the 100% renewable energy transition is an excellent opportunity.

Based on these interviews, Neighbours United Recommends:

Housing

- Prioritizing creating permanent housing for vulnerable people, and ensuring it's built to the highest energy efficiency standard, BC Step Code 5: net-zero ready, so it's comfortable and affordable for tenants to actually live in
- Ensuring housing is near community services and accessible transportation hubs, like bus exchanges

Transportation

- Prioritizing increasing public transit services to areas of the community with concentrations of lower-income residents, and create Sunday bus service
- Making public transportation free for seniors, children and youth, unhoused, and low-income residents
- Ensuring sidewalk safety and accessibility
- Supporting more options for community ride sharing

Other sectors

- When implementing local solutions, prioritize hiring residents from marginalized communities to develop skills and do the on-the-ground work
- Offering more education and community engagement for residents to start and maintain personal and community gardens, as well as community kitchen and cooking spaces
- Advocate to the provincial and federal governments for the implementation of a guaranteed livable income.

Concluding remarks

During these interviews, several participants shared that being included and having their voice heard wasn't something they often experienced and made them feel motivated to be a part of positive change for themselves, their families, and their community.

Overall, participants need more education, training, and financial support to meet their basic needs. With this support, many participants are willing to start doing their part in the renewable energy transition. We, therefore, also recommend advocating to other levels of government to provide more education, training, and financial support to meet basic needs of low-income, racialized and houseless people in your community for supports required outside of local government jurisdiction.

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