

## **Candidate Responses on Air Quality: City of Courtenay**

Breathe Clean Air circulated a questionnaire on air quality to all candidates running in the local government elections in the Comox Valley in 2022.

This document shares results from candidates in the City of Courtenay. Please visit our website at [www.breathecleanair.ca](http://www.breathecleanair.ca) for responses from candidates in other areas.

The questions and responses from each candidate are below, along with additional comments provided by some of the candidates.

### *Notes on the questionnaire and results:*

- *All candidates were sent at least one reminder to complete the survey.*
- *Most candidates replied to the survey in full. A few did not, while others skipped certain questions. All questions to which a candidate did not reply are marked “did not reply.”*
- *Candidates who had no publicly available online contact details, or whose details could not be found, are marked as “no contact info.”*
- *Nicole Minions has been named Mayor of Comox by acclamation; nevertheless, she completed the survey, and we have included her responses.*
- *Candidates’ responses are provided in full and are unedited.*

# Question 1

Every winter, the Comox Valley experiences poor air quality due to high levels of harmful fine particulate matter. We experience air quality advisories and frequently break BC Air Quality Objectives. We are one of the worst communities of 13 monitored in the Georgia Strait Air Zone.

In the Comox Valley, we know wood smoke is the source of most of our fine particulates (or “PM2.5”). Everyone’s health can be impacted by poor air quality, particularly children, seniors, and people with pre-existing conditions. Studies show these particulates increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes, increase the rate of respiratory infections and lung cancer, impact lung development in infants and children, and much more (see Doctors & Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution).

**Are you concerned about wood smoke in the Comox Valley and how it is affecting people’s health?**

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**COURTENAY**

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	Yes	
Bob Wells	Yes	I was there when our Medical Health Officer Charmaine Enns and members of Island Health and BC Health delivered the news of our poor air quality and its negative impact on our health. I found funding through Island Health to get the Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable up and running and look forward to its recommendations. In the meantime the City has moved forward with bylaws to not allow wood stoves in new buildings and have tried to have open dialogue with the Hearth association to create a source of properly seasoned wood for the Comox Valley.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	
Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	
Brennan Day	Yes	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	Yes	A lot of people in regional district have wood stoves for back-up. New wood stoves are extremely efficient but not everybody has one. Woodstoves are not allowed in Courtenay I believe. But when the power is out, poor people need to stay warm in the winter too.

Doug Hillian	Yes	I have heard from many people whose health is impacted by wood smoke, including members of Breathe Clean Air, have participated in BC Lung Association webinars, and have discussed the issue with our Medical Health Officer.
Evan Jolicoeur	Yes	
Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	This is a significant health concern. Reducing PM 2.5 in Courtenay has been a focus of our policy and by-law work both at City Council and the Regional District Board.
Wendy Morin	Yes	
Lyndsey Northcott	Yes	Particularly I'm concerned about the matter of which individuals are burning. People are burning garbage and wet wood.
Deana Simkin	Yes	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	Yes	

## Question 2

Mobile air monitoring studies in our area have shown that older neighbourhoods (where wood stove use is typically higher) experience the worst air quality in the Valley. Some areas showed poorer air quality than what was recorded at the government monitor at Courtenay Elementary School.

The management of wood stove installation and use falls largely under local government control. Local governments can use a diversity of approaches to help reduce wood stove pollution. For example, local governments can help raise awareness of the health impacts of wood smoke, support incentives for people to switch to cleaner fuels, prevent wood burning on bad air days, disallow new installations to stop the spread of wood stoves particularly in populated areas, and more. A range of approaches needs to be adopted to ensure success.

**If elected, do you commit to working to ensure meaningful, multi-pronged strategies for reducing wood stove pollution are created and implemented?**

### COURTENAY

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	Yes	
Bob Wells	Yes	I have already begun and plan to continue to support strategies that will reduce wood smoke pollution.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	
Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	I do. The City of Courtenay has amended our Nuisance Abatement Bylaw to specifically include a reference to "Nuisance Smoke" "8. No person shall create or allow the emission of smoke that: (a) visibly drifts onto an adjacent property; (b) interferes with a person's use and enjoyment of privately owned real property; or (c) interferes with a person's use or enjoyment of public property including sidewalks, roadways, and parks. " Enforcement will begin with warnings and education, however if these measures are unsuccessful it does allow for a fine of up to \$500. We have also prevented the installation of woodstoves in new construction.
Brennan Day	Yes	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	Yes	Depends on the meaningful, multi-pronged strategies and what they are.
Doug Hillian	Yes	I have advocated for speedier action through the regional Airshed Roundtable and supported actions taken by the City of Courtenay to transition to cleaner home heating and address problem burning through education and bylaw measures.
Evan Jolicoeur	Yes	

Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	The motions I've introduced over the term in regard to woodsmoke are a demonstration of my commitment to this issue.
Wendy Morin	Yes	
Lyndsey Northcott	Did not reply	
Deana Simkin	Yes	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	Yes	

### Question 3

A wood stove, even when it is new and run perfectly, will put out far more fine particulate matter than any other source of home heating. A government agency in Puget Sound indicates that a well-run EPA certified wood stove puts out 582 times more fine particulates a year than a gas furnace or stove. Research in the UK has shown that even a brand new eco-certified stove, burning dry wood at high temperatures, will emit more harmful fine particulate matter per hour than 18 newer diesel cars, all in one fixed location.

This means people living near wood stoves, especially in more densely populated areas, are exposed to far more fine particulate matter than people living near other types of heat. Health experts say there is no safe level of exposure to fine particulate matter and that any reduction will reduce health impacts.

In 2021, CVRD convened the multi-stakeholder Airshed Roundtable to develop and implement a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy to guide air quality actions. To help protect public health, one of the main actions in the draft plan is to transition homes in populated areas away from using wood heating.

**Do you agree that we need to work towards transitioning homes in populated areas away from using wood stoves (except in emergencies)?**

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#### COURTENAY

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	No	
Bob Wells	Yes	Yes. As someone that owns a wood stove I transitioned away from using it except for emergencies when power is out.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	

Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	I believe that we need to help people transition from using wood as a primary heat source, to having wood as a back-up in emergencies. This can best be achieved through low-interest loan programs like PACE that allow people to install alternate heating systems like heat pumps. While grants are helpful, low interest loans will remove the initial financial barrier. As Chair of Help Cities Lead, I have advocated to the Province of BC for a PACE low interest loan program for heat pumps (I worked to get 36 local governments from Kitimat to Vancouver on board - with each passing a resolution endorsing our work and asking that the province implement a PACE loan program). As a result the Province has formally committed to introducing a PACE loan program which is currently under development. The CVRD does offer a grant of \$2000 toward the cost of a heat pump when removing an older stove, with an additional \$2500 if the home is in a hotspot area like west Courtenay. However, I believe that a PACE program which allows people to upgrade to a heat pump, while allowing them to retain the stove for emergency use, is more likely to see widespread adoption by the public.
Brennan Day	No	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	Yes	
Doug Hillian	Yes	This was the intent of our prohibition on wood burning appliances in new construction, along with incentives to install heat pumps.
Evan Jolicoeur	Yes	
Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	We are making gains in this regard through rebates and public education, but there is still work to do.
Wendy Morin	No	This is a qualified 'no.' I would like to see how our initiatives are working, and to find ways to assist folks in transitioning, due to equity issues.
Lyndsey Northcott	Did not reply	
Deana Simkin	Did not reply	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	Yes	

## Question 4

Individuals who burn wet wood or other illegal materials, or who do not use their stove appropriately, will create notably more smoke pollution than people who burn dry wood in hot fires. Neighbours of wood stove users can be exposed to very different pollution levels.

Local governments have the authority to develop and enforce bylaws to protect people's use and enjoyment of their own property, and their health and well-being. This is done for noise and other disturbances. They also have authority to regulate wood stove use.

**If elected, do you commit to ensuring there are workable and fair bylaws that will help neighbours protect their families and property from harmful wood smoke?**

### COURTENAY

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	Yes	
Bob Wells	Yes	The City of Courtenay has already begun the process to create nuisance bylaws to first work with citizens towards compliance before enacting penalties.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	
Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	The City of Courtenay has amended our Nuisance Abatement Bylaw to specifically include a reference to "Nuisance Smoke" "8. No person shall create or allow the emission of smoke that: (a) visibly drifts onto an adjacent property; (b) interferes with a person's use and enjoyment of privately owned real property; or (c) interferes with a person's use or enjoyment of public property including sidewalks, roadways, and parks." Enforcement will begin with warnings and education, however if these measures are unsuccessful it does allow for a fine of up to \$500
Brennan Day	Yes	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	Yes	
Doug Hillian	Yes	Courtenay is in the process of installing just such a bylaw, along with a public education program.
Evan Jolicoeur	Yes	
Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	Today's (Sept 26th) Council agenda is introducing new by-law changes to help address poor woodburning practices.
Wendy Morin	Yes	Courtenay is in the process of passing bylaws.

Lyndsey Northcott	Did not reply	
Deana Simkin	Did not reply	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	Yes	

## Question 5

To help ensure the wood smoke problem did not get any worse, all three municipalities passed bylaws in the last few years to prevent wood stoves from being installed in new construction. In Comox and Courtenay, the bylaws also said homes that did not already have a wood burning appliance were not allowed to install one after the bylaws were passed.

These bylaws effectively capped the number of wood stoves in these three municipalities, helping to ensure the problem would not get any worse. It also protected people who intentionally moved to cleaner areas from having a wood stove pop up next door.

**Do you commit to keeping your municipality's "no new installation" bylaws in place to prevent the increase in the number of wood burning appliances?**

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### COURTENAY

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	Yes	
Bob Wells	Yes	
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	
Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	
Brennan Day	No	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	Yes	So, if the power goes out, I have natural gas to stay warm and I know someone in CVRD that has a new woodstove.
Doug Hillian	Yes	
Evan Jolicoeur	Yes	
Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	
Wendy Morin	Yes	
Lyndsey Northcott	Did not reply	
Deana Simkin	Did not reply	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	No	

## Question 6

Burning of yard waste, including leaves and branches, is regulated by local governments.

These yard waste fires create a lot of harmful localized smoke, impacting neighbours' use and enjoyment of their own property as well as their health.

Although yard waste fires have been banned in Comox, Courtenay, and Cumberland, they are allowed in the rest of the CVRD and are impacting both neighbours and neighbouring communities. (BC regulates larger open burns and agricultural waste fires and these are not the focus of this question).

In 2021, the CVRD convened the multi-stakeholder Airshed Roundtable to develop and implement a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy to guide air quality actions. To help protect public health, one of the main actions includes eliminating yard waste burning.

**Do you support the elimination of yard waste burning in the CVRD?**

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### COURTENAY

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Aaron Dowker	Did not reply	
Erik Eriksson	No	
Bob Wells	Yes	
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Philip Adams	No contact info	
Steffan Chmuryk	Did not reply	
Will Cole-Hamilton	Yes	
Brennan Day	Yes	
David Frisch	Yes	
Michael Gilbert	No	I don't think I have enough information at this time to make an informed decision and you did not give an alternative to "no".
Doug Hillian	Yes	
Evan Jolicoeur	No	Would want to know more about the usage in regional areas, and impacts on farming, and large rural properties. Do Regional area residents have green waste pickup?
Jin Lin	Did not reply	
Melanie McCollum	Yes	Yes, I would like to see this change, but this is a matter for the Electoral Areas to address, and is not my jurisdiction as a City Councillor.
Wendy Morin	No	I'd like more info as I am not an electoral area director.

Lyndsey Northcott	Did not reply	
Deana Simkin	Did not reply	
Manno Theos	No contact info	
Starr Winchester	Did not reply	