

Candidate Responses on Air Quality: Village of Cumberland

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 Village of Cumberland. Please visit our website at 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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	I am concerned about wood smoke in the Comox Valley. Cumberland passed Solid Fuel Burning Appliance bylaw No.1091 in 2018. Banning the installation of wood stoves in new construction. I have witness a definite decrease in wood smoke in the area.
Vickey Brown	Yes	
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	Yes	
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	Yes	Anything that affects the health of valley residents is a concern.

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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	Cumberland joined the CVRD, City of Courtenay and Town of Comox to work together to address this issue as air movement has no boundaries. We have had meetings with Forest Companies to stop slashing burning in our area.
Vickey Brown	Yes	I think there are opportunities for further education and awareness raising for sure. Especially around when to order wood, how to store it and how to operate the stove efficiently.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	Yes	The entirety of the Village of Cumberland was shown to be a "hotspot" and there are multiple days during the winter when my children cannot play outside at Cumberland school. We have already implemented a bylaw that prevents woodstoves from being installed in NEW construction. I have NO intention of repealing the bylaw.
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	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)?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	Yes I agree with that statement, but what we are finding in our Community is that it is the people that are finding other sources of heat. 1. cost of wood 2. its harder to find 3. residents are aging and do not want the work involved in burning wood.
Vickey Brown	No	I'm saying no - because what is an emergency? I think we need to take a harm reduction and equity approach. We can encourage and incentivize people to switch to electric heat systems, but I for those people who are dependent on woodstoves for their heat and have efficient and current woodstoves I think we need to allow them to continue to use their stove. I think people will naturally transition away as we raise awareness and people age out of woodstove use.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	Yes	Yes I think the key word there is in POPULATED areas. That is why the municipalities all put forward the same bylaw about no woodstoves in new construction. Woodstoves in less populated rural areas do not have the same considerations and there has been NO change in woodstove regulation for these areas.
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	We will continue to work with the CVRD and choose bylaws that are fair to the residents after we have public discussions on the topic.
Vickey Brown	Yes	I believe that we should first reach out to the homeowner (woodstove owner) first with education, and support. And follow up with bylaw as needed.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	Yes	While local governments can regulate whether a woodstove is permitted or not the use of the stove is different. For example, if there is a backyard fire and someone is burning garbage our Fire Chief can inspect and prevent that but if he see blue smoke coming from the chimney of a home and suspects that they are burning garbage he can knock on the door, and ask that they stop, but he doesnt have the authority to go inside and inspect the woodstove and what is being burned, that is the authority of the Ministry of Environment.
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	Since our bylaw was adopted we have had only one request to install a wood stove. Staff followed the bylaw (No).
Vickey Brown	Yes	
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	Yes	Absolutely
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	Yes	

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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Leslie Baird	Yes	We felt it was responsibility to stop this practice from happening within the Village. The risk to public health is too great.
Vickey Brown	Yes	I understand that these yard waste items are accepted to the landfill for composting and I believe that this is the best way to deal with yard waste (apart from leaving leaves on the ground or composting on site). I would also support reducing fees for compostable material at the landfill to encourage this shift.
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Neil Borecky	Did not reply	
Tanis Frame	Did not reply	
Jesse Ketler	No	In Cumberland we started the yard waste curbside pick-up when we instituted the ban on yard waste fires so that we could provide an alternative to burning. I am not sure of what alternatives are available to the rural areas so I would leave that to the Area Directors to investigate.
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Troy Therrien	Yes	