

Candidate Responses on Air Quality: CVRD Electoral Areas

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 Comox Valley Regional District Electoral Areas A, B and C. 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?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Question 1: Are you concerned about wood smoke in the Comox Valley and how it is affecting people’s health?

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	Yes	At our last CVRD Board meeting, the North Island Health Officer presented on the fact that air quality, in particular PM2.5, needs to be improved in the Valley, as it is a serious concern.
Gordon Kennedy (A)	Yes	Scrubbers could be used to clean the air for wood burning stoves. Costs about \$300. My father once told me this has been used in commercial applications since the 1930's.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	Yes	The age of the Woodstoves plays an important role in mitigating the effects of woodsmoke
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Yes	I don't think people really understand that the health impacts of breathing in PM2.5 aren't just for children & the elderly. The way PM2.5 dissolves in the blood and crosses the brain barrier - this is not widely understood. Our Medical Health Officer, Dr. Enns, has really tried her best to bring this information to the community but we do need to do more.
Richard Hardy (B)	<i>Did not reply</i>	
Keith Stevens (B)	Yes	I would like to provide everyone about responsible use of there wood stove. That way each user would understand the problem of burning unclean and wood that is not dried properly..
Matthew Ellis (C)	No	
Edwin Grieve (C)	Yes	Unfortunately there are “hot spots” in some urban areas. We need to invest in mobile monitors to better identify who is actually causing the issue

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?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Question 2: Do you commit to working to ensure meaningful, multi-pronged strategies for reducing wood stove pollution are created and implemented?

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	Yes	The Airshed Roundtable should continue its work, building on the strategy that has been drafted.
Gordon Kennedy (A)	Yes	Change zoning so old inefficiently insulated houses can be replaced. I built my house 2 years ago with solar panels and a heat pump for 153\$ per Sq Ft 3 years ago. It can be done at a reasonable cost. Only allow high efficiency stoves like the European Kachelofen or soapstone stoves and make scrubbers mandatory.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	Yes	Working on exchange programs and education around best practices.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Yes	We need monitors all throughout the valley, not just in the municipalities. In Area B, the neighbourhoods around Huband School are particularly high density and woodsmoke hangs there. Ideally, I would love to see homes in the rural areas move towards heat pumps as their primary source of heating (and cooling in the summers!) with a woodstove just as emergency back up during extended power outages
Richard Hardy (B)	Did not reply	
Keith Stevens (B)	Yes	I would try to promote the use of more modern and efficient wood stoves.
Matthew Ellis (C)	No	We can fine irresponsible burners by giving the power of enforcement to our fire departments, as well as putting out advisories on inversion days.
Edwin Grieve (C)	Yes	Out here in the rural areas, power failures can last hours and even days. Heat pumps are great but modern high efficiency wood stoves are a viable back up

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)?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	Yes	The policies implemented by the municipalities should be effective in reducing wood smoke over time.
Gordon Kennedy (A)	Yes	In Germany a friend of mine lives in a town where the town initiated geo thermal heating. It was 7,000 euros to buy in. Now 7 years later she has cheap green heat and hot water. Why are Canadian municipal governments not doing this.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	No	As we face the unknowns of climate change it's important that we look at all options to ensure residents have the ability to stay warm during severe storms causing prolonged power outages. Communication with all stakeholders is important but I can not commit to something I don't have all the information on.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Yes	Agree. Heat pumps are also very beneficial during heat waves.
Richard Hardy (B)	Did not reply	
Keith Stevens (B)	Yes	I am aware of this problem, however with the high cost of converting, it may be out of reach for some Woodstock users. We as a council have to make sure we consider both sides of the problem before we act.
Matthew Ellis (C)	No	Absolutely not, this is an attack on low income persons, and those on fixed incomes. Wood heat is both an important source of primary heat for many, as well as a secondary source in the event of prolonged power outages.
Edwin Grieve (C)	Yes	Again it boils down to which individuals are causing the majority of the problems. Mobile monitors could identify the worst offenders.

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?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	Yes	Bylaws are always good to protect against egregious situations.
Gordon Kennedy (A)	Yes	Education and bylaws. Make it clear what can and cannot be used and why.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	Yes	I will support ones choice to have a Woodstove but will look at measures to ensure they are using the latest technology and best burning practices.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	No	This is a tough one. I don't know if a bylaw for rural areas will work. We saw a huge push-back in the rural community to the removal of woodstoves with our incentive program. I think mobile monitors and education will need to come first.
Richard Hardy (B)	Did not reply	
Keith Stevens (B)	Yes	Again properly educated each user of the hazards of improperly use of the woodstove may result in a fine.
Matthew Ellis (C)	Yes	Again, I will say that we can give the power of Bylaw Enforcement against irresponsible burners to the fire departments, as well as create advisories for inversion days.
Edwin Grieve (C)	Yes	I believe that, much like inspection of failing septic systems, certification of chimneys and stoves could be conducted every few years

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?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	
Gordon Kennedy (A)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	We do need to control what type of stoves and how they are used even in rural electoral areas.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	
Arzeena Hamir (B)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	
Richard Hardy (B)	Did not reply	
Keith Stevens (B)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	This is a program that needs to be addressed through the Regional Growth Strategy policy and it is out of date.
Matthew Ellis (C)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	I'm running in Area C of the CVRD, and I am opposed to any bylaws attempting to limit the installation of wood stoves.
Edwin Grieve (C)	N/A as I am running in a CVRD Electoral Area	

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?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Daniel Arbour (A)	No	I support the reduction, not elimination. The CVRD Fire Departments recently launched a chipping program in a number of our communities, and I would like to find more permanent funding for this program, which has been well received.
Gordon Kennedy (A)	Yes	It makes me angry that the recycling yard does not have a place for yard waste. I, like some of my neighbors, take our yard waste to friends who have unlimited pick up in other jurisdictions. We need a drop off for yard waste in the recycling yard.
Tamara Meggitt (A)	No	Living in the CVRD often means larger properties. Having the ability to deal with yard waste is of high importance to rural residents. We can implement bans on days when inversions are happening but an all out ban is not something I support.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Yes	As a farmer, I cringe when I see wood products burned. We need to return that carbon into the soil, not into the air. Thankfully, the rural areas have a chipping program for Fire Suppression that enables home owners to leave their yard waste out to be chipped and taken away. I commit to bringing that program to more neighbourhoods, especially in Area B (which is under Courtenay & Comox Fire Protection).
Richard Hardy (B)	Did not reply	
Keith Stevens (B)	Yes	There is a problem with my answer because the elimination of any type of local recycling program, residents are left with little options.
Matthew Ellis (C)	No	Absolutely not, the Regional District electoral areas are rural, and this is an activity to be expected in a rural area.
Edwin Grieve (C)	No	Unfortunately we can't even get public approval for recycling pick up. The proposed bylaw would also have included twice yearly yard waste pick up as well. Not everyone knows you can take it to the Dump no charge. We need to offer this service