



NEWS RELEASE

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Local Candidates Respond Favourably to Air Quality Questionnaire

Courtenay – Candidates in the local government elections have responded to an air quality questionnaire distributed by Breathe Clean Air Comox Valley. Of 44 candidates, 35 responded in full (7 didn't reply at all, 2 only answered one or two questions and 2 had no contact information).

All but one of those who responded were concerned about wood smoke in the Comox Valley and how it affects people's health and they also indicated they would work to ensure multi-pronged strategies for reducing wood smoke pollution.

"We were very glad to see that those who took the time to respond indicated almost unanimous concern about wood smoke pollution in our area and are committed to meaningful action," said Jennell Ellis, a volunteer with Breathe Clean Air. "Sadly, a number running for public office declined to share their views on this significant, well-documented, public health issue."

Another question asked if candidates agreed with a key action that is found in the draft Wood Smoke Reduction Strategy created by the CVRD convened Airshed Roundtable. The action talks about working towards transitioning homes in populated areas away from using wood stoves. The question added "except in emergencies".

"A few disagreed with this broadly supported action," noted Steven Faraher-Amidon, another Breathe Clean Air volunteer. "But some of the comments indicate people do not understand this is about a transition over time that recognizes both low-income people who are using wood for heat as well as their close neighbours who are forced to breathe wood smoke. We need to make a change so everyone can breathe clean air, but we need to do it in a socially just way."

With a couple of exceptions, municipal candidates agreed to keep the current bylaws that prevent the installation of new stoves in new construction in place. According to the questionnaire, the bylaws capped the number of stoves in a municipality to prevent the air quality problem from getting any worse.

"We are pleased with how many continue to support these no-new installation bylaws despite persistent and often misleading campaigns by the Hearth, Patio and Barbeque Association in Canada and the US to get them overturned," said Ellis. "These bylaws are a small step in the right direction to ensure the pollution doesn't get any worse. We are concerned about the few who explicitly said they wouldn't keep them in place or who refused to answer these questions but, on the whole, the majority are not willing to go backwards on this."

The last question asked if people supported the elimination of yard waste burning in CVRD. Half of candidates in the CVRD electoral areas who responded indicated 'no' although some comments highlighted the support for reducing yard waste burning by providing alternatives such as chipping or pick-up. A number of municipal candidates indicated they felt this was a CVRD decision even though much of the burning happens along town boundaries.

“Overall, we found the responses and comments in the questionnaire to reflect a strong concern for air quality in the Valley,” concluded Ellis. “However, there is still a persistent belief that newer stoves, if run well, are a solution even though multiple studies show any wood stove pollutes people’s lungs and bodies far more than any other type of heat and that real world use far exceeds factory tests no matter how much burning education is provided. In rural areas they make more sense, but in populated areas one stove can impact so many people. We need to move towards cleaner solutions that don’t require taxes paying for ongoing education, monitoring and enforcement.”

Answers from each candidate are available on the Breathe Clean Air website:

www.breathecleanair.ca/election2022.

For more information:

Jennell Ellis

250-465-9192 (cell)

info@breathecleanair.ca

www.breathecleanair.ca