

Candidate Responses on Air Quality: Town of Comox

Breathe Clean Air circulated a questionnaire on air quality to all candidates running in the local government elections in the Comox Valley in 2026.

This document shares results from candidates in the Town of Comox. Please visit our website at www.breathcleanair.ca/election2026 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.*
- *Many candidates replied to the survey in full. Others did not, while others skipped certain questions. All questions to which a candidate did not reply are marked "didn't 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 was elected mayor by acclamation.*
- *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 from wood stoves. 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. Everyone's health can be impacted by poor air quality, particularly children, seniors, and people with pre-existing conditions.

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

Comox

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidate</i>		
Nicole Minions	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Lisa Bourgeois	Yes	Clean air is a basic public health issue, and the evidence shows that fine particulate matter from wood smoke is a significant concern in the Comox Valley, particularly during the winter. I am especially concerned about the impact on children, seniors and people with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. I also recognize that some residents have historically relied on wood for heat, so solutions need to be practical, fair and supported by good information and reasonable alternatives.
Steve M. Blacklock	Yes	In my opinion the Town of Comox is the best of the 3 C's with respect to air quality. But yes, wood smoke is unpleasant, and harmful to health, particularly for people with COPD, asthma, or other lung issues.
Maureen Swift	Yes	I am concerned about the level of wood smoke in the valley. Once the weather turns, you can smell it even if you can't see it. I walk on a regular basis and I have had people stop me and complain about it.
Vivian Chislett	Yes	
Neil Ladell	Didn't reply	
Ken J. Grant	Didn't reply	
Chris T. Haslett	Didn't reply	
Jonathan Kerr	Yes	As a family physician, I see more of my patients having exacerbations of asthma and COPD during the winter months. Many of them have informed me that their symptoms are triggered whenever their neighbour(s) are burning wood. Having clean air is an important component to fostering a Healthy Community, Healthy People, and a Healthy Environment.

Jenn Meilleur	Yes	Clean air is fundamental to community health. Reducing exposure to fine particulate matter, particularly for children, older adults and people with health vulnerabilities, is important to me.
Ruby Sidhu	Didn't reply	
Jessica Wegg	Yes	

Question 2

The development of the Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable Action Plan involved local governments, health authorities, industry groups, environmental non-profits, and community members. The plan's goals include a reduction of existing wood-burning appliances and their emissions, a transition away from wood-burning appliances in densely populated areas, along with a reduction of yard waste burning, promotion of alternatives, and expanded research data on particulate mater.

If elected, will you work toward fulfilling the 2023 Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable Action Plan?

Comox

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidate</i>		
Nicole Minions	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Lisa Bourgeois	yes	The Airshed Protection Strategy was developed collaboratively with local governments, health professionals, community organizations, industry and residents. I support continuing that regional approach rather than having individual municipalities work in isolation. If elected, I would support practical implementation of the plan within the Town of Comox's jurisdiction, including better public education, improved air-quality monitoring, incentives to transition to cleaner heating options and regional cooperation to reduce wood smoke and open burning. I would also want implementation decisions to consider affordability and the circumstances of residents who may need assistance transitioning to another source of heat.
Steve M. Blacklock	Yes	I have already noticed improvements in Comox since 2023
Maureen Swift	Yes	Comox does not allow yard burning or installation of new wood burning appliances. It would be great to have more data.
Vivian Chislett	Yes	I support the Strategy's vision and most of its action areas. Reducing emissions from existing wood-burning appliances, cutting emissions from recreational fires and yard waste burning, addressing non-residential open burning, expanding PM2.5 data collection, and expanding education are all steps I'd work to advance if elected. Where I'd want to look more closely is Action 2 — transitioning away from wood-burning appliances in densely populated areas. That's likely to mean new bylaws and costs for residents who rely on wood heat, including as backup during power outages, so I'd want to see the implementation details and hear from affected residents before committing to a specific approach. But the direction — cleaner air for the Valley — is one I support.
Neil Ladell	Didn't reply	

Ken J. Grant	Didn't reply	
Chris T. Haslett	Didn't reply	
Jonathan Kerr	Yes	We need a multi-factorial approach including education, incentives, new by-laws, and by-law enforcement. With respect to education, for those currently using wood stoves, we should encourage the use of dry wood so that those with lung conditions are less affected by the smoke. We should also limit wood burning on bad air days, when our lung health is already at risk. For those burning wood because it is their most affordable heating option, we should advocate for and provide financial incentives to help people make the switch from wood to healthier forms of heat. For example, incentives to install a heat pump could be provided which would allow for a healthier form of heat during the winter, while also providing air conditioning during the summer, increasing safety and security during extreme heat waves. The Town of Comox already prohibits the installation of wood stoves in new homes and during home renovations. We could also consider creating a new by-law which would require that wood stoves be replaced whenever a home is sold within the Town of Comox. While I don't think it would be right for us to force people to remove their wood stoves, these combined measures would allow for the gradual phase-out of wood-burning appliances over time and an improvement in air quality.
Jenn Meilleur		I support implementation of the 2023 Airshed Protection Strategy. I was part of the CVRD staff team that helped establish the Airshed Roundtable in 2019, and I'm pleased to see that collaborative work result in a regional action plan.
Ruby Sidhu	Didn't reply	
Jessica Wegg	Yes	

Question 3

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 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?

Comox

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidate</i>		
Nicole Minions	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Lisa Bourgeois	Yes	I support maintaining the Town of Comox's existing restrictions that prevent new wood-burning appliances from being added where one does not already exist. These rules help prevent the problem from becoming worse as our community grows and becomes more densely populated. If further changes are proposed, I would consider them based on evidence, public health impacts, enforceability and fairness to residents. My preference would be to combine sensible regulation with education and incentives that help people move toward cleaner heating alternatives.
Steve M. Blacklock	Yes	The Town of Comox already has these bylaws in place and will continue to be leaders in addressing this issue.
Maureen Swift	Yes	Comox has already put a cap on installations.

Vivian Chislett		I support the intent behind the existing "no new installation" bylaws — capping the number of wood-burning appliances is a reasonable way to keep the problem from getting worse while other solutions are developed. Whether I'd support strengthening them further is something I'd want to look at closely, informed by data on health impacts, the cost and availability of alternatives, and resident feedback. One thing I'd want any strengthened bylaw to account for is emergency backup heat. Heat pumps and other electric heating rely on the grid — they don't help when the power itself goes out, which is exactly when people need backup heat most, especially in winter storms. The Strategy itself acknowledges this, noting that rural households depend on wood heat as a reliable option during power outages. A bylaw that closes off wood stoves entirely, with no allowance for backup heating, could leave people without any way to heat their home safely when the grid fails. I'd want to see this addressed directly — whether through an emergency-use exemption, support for other off-grid options (like battery storage or generators), or some other approach — before supporting further restrictions.
Neil Ladell	Didn't reply	
Ken J. Grant	Didn't reply	
Chris T. Haslett	Didn't reply	
Jonathan Kerr	Yes	I am committed to maintaining the Town of Comox's current bylaw preventing the installation of new wood burning appliances. I invite you to visit my website (www.healthycomox.ca) to see my commitments to reducing wood smoke exposure in Comox, as well as my voting record and position on various other issues that are important to the health of our community.
Jenn Meilleur	Yes	I support maintaining and strengthening Comox's approach to preventing new wood-burning appliances, while also ensuring that emergency preparedness and access to reliable backup heat are addressed as we transition to cleaner heating
Ruby Sidhu	Didn't reply	
Jessica Wegg	Yes	I would certainly take a look at the existing bylaws to see how Comox's bylaws could be built upon in this area. As you said, we already have a bylaw prohibiting homes without a wood-burning appliance from installing one.

Question 4

Our summers are increasingly vulnerable to wildfire smoke. The danger to property and the potential for lost lives is real. While our ability to reduce wildfires in the summer is bound up with much larger climate change issue, our ability to reduce the same kind of smoke hazard in the winter is within our reach.

If elected, what will you do to reduce winter wood smoke pollution in the Comox Valley?

Comox

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidate</i>		
Nicole Minions	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Lisa Bourgeois		I would support a practical, regional approach focused on prevention, education and helping residents transition to cleaner alternatives. As a Comox Councillor, I would support: maintaining restrictions on new wood-burning appliance installations; working with the CVRD and neighbouring municipalities to implement the Regional Airshed Protection Strategy; promoting and expanding incentives that help residents replace older wood-burning appliances with cleaner heating options; continuing education about the health effects of wood smoke and cleaner burning practices for households that still rely on wood; supporting air-quality monitoring so decisions are based on reliable local data; and continuing efforts to reduce unnecessary open burning and promote practical alternatives. Clean air is something we share across municipal boundaries. Improving it will require cooperation across the Comox Valley, along with policies that protect public health while recognizing the practical and financial realities residents face.
Steve M. Blacklock		Amplify public education efforts around 'clean burning', alternative fuels, and alternative systems available for home heating
Maureen Swift		I would like to see more data collection and education on the effects of wood smoke to convince people that it is no longer an acceptable way to heat their homes. It is slow moving but, we no longer smoke in restaurants or on airplanes and I believe we can do the same with wood burning appliances once the awareness is there.

Vivian Chislett		Winter wood smoke is a problem, and I'd support the Strategy's core actions — reducing emissions from existing appliances, cutting recreational and yard-waste burning, expanding data collection, and stepping up public education. I support keeping the current "no new installation" bylaws in place. I'm open to strengthening them, but only if it accounts for a real gap: electric heat doesn't work when the power's out, and wood heat is often the only off-grid backup households have in a winter storm. Any further restriction needs an emergency-use allowance, not a blanket ban. I'd also support incentives that help households replace old, high-emission stoves with cleaner options, prioritizing PM2.5 hotspots and keeping cost from being a barrier for lower-income households.
Neil Ladell	Didn't reply	
Ken J. Grant	Didn't reply	
Chris T. Haslett	Didn't reply	
Jonathan Kerr		I commit to ensuring there are workable and fair bylaws that will help neighbours protect their families and property from harmful wood smoke. We need more air quality monitoring in the Comox Valley, and more enforcement when neighbourhood air quality is too high due to wood smoke.
Jenn Meilleur		I will support implementation of the Airshed Protection Strategy, including reducing wood-burning appliances in populated areas, expanding access to cleaner and affordable heating, strengthening education and enforcement, improving air-quality monitoring, and continuing to work regionally on reducing wood smoke and yard-waste burning
Ruby Sidhu	Didn't reply	
Jessica Wegg		One part of the Action Plan that really stood out to me was education regarding wood smoke and making moisture meters available. I am not insensitive to the fact many people rely on wood burning as their primary source because it is affordable and reliable. But I also know that there are people who take advantage of this need and sell unseasoned wood (claiming that it is seasoned and dry), resulting in fires that are difficult to start and very smoky. I would like to see our community educated on wood selection (including moisture levels) and efficient use of their stoves/fireplaces. Additionally, I would look into how we could use bylaws to regulate and enforce the sale of "dry" wood.