

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 2026.

This document shares results from candidates in the Village of Cumberland. 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."*
- *Vickey Brown has been named Mayor of Cumberland 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 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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Vickey Brown	Yes	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Nick Ward	Yes	I know people who have moved to Cumberland with no history of respiratory illness, become sick with asthma, then moved to a higher part of town above the bulk of the winter woodsmoke, and seen their symptoms ease dramatically. Sadly, we all know what it feels like to breathe wildfire smoke, and the effect on vulnerable people is serious.
Kevin Snaden	Yes	Fine particulate matter from wood smoke is a real health concern, and it's proven that the Comox Valley's geography can trap smoke close to the ground during calm conditions and inversions. Wood heat is also deeply connected to Cumberland's history and culture. Many families here grew up cutting firewood, seasoning it for the following winter and heating their homes with wood. I respect that history. At the same time, impacts on neighbours are real. I have experienced smoke settling around my own home, particularly in the shoulder seasons when windows are still open, and I run air purifiers on each floor partly because of it. A person's choice of heating should not repeatedly fill neighbouring homes with smoke.
Zanoni Agnew	Didn't reply	
Ellian Bell	Didn't reply	
Sean Sullivan	Didn't reply	
Troy Therrien	Didn't reply	
Neil Borecky	Didn't reply	

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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Vickey Brown	Yes	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Nick Ward	Yes	Reducing the total amount of wood burning and limiting pollution through the winter is the right objective. It doesn't mean we need to ban woodstoves, but to make sure that they are used less often and correctly.
Kevin Snaden	Yes	I support better air-quality monitoring, education about proper burning, incentives for cleaner heating, and helping homeowners transition to heat pumps and other lower-emission options. Existing rebates already make that transition more affordable for many households. I would be more cautious about rules that suddenly prohibit existing residents from using wood heat. I favour a gradual transition that focuses first on the oldest appliances, wet or improperly seasoned wood, poor maintenance and fires that are allowed to smoulder. I also think residents should recognize that wood-burning regulations are likely to become more restrictive over time, whether locally or through senior governments, and begin thinking about their next heating system. I think that will come sooner rather than later.
Zanoni Agnew	Didn't reply	
Ellian Bell	Yes	
Sean Sullivan	Didn't reply	
Troy Therrien	Didn't reply	
Neil Borecky	Didn't reply	

Question 3

Question 3

To help ensure the wood smoke problem does not get any worse, all three municipalities passed bylaws to prevent wood stoves from being installed in new construction. In Comox and Courtenay, the bylaws also say homes that do not already have a wood-burning appliance are not allowed to install one. These bylaws effectively cap the number of wood stoves in these municipalities, helping to ensure the problem does not get any worse.

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>		
Vickey Brown	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor Candidates</i>		
Zanoni Agnew	Didn't reply	
Kevin Snaden	Yes	Cumberland already prohibits wood-burning appliances in new residential construction. I would support going further so that an existing home that does not currently have a wood-burning appliance generally cannot be retrofitted to add one, particularly in denser residential areas. For homes that already rely on wood heat, I would prefer a reasonable grandfathering period rather than requiring immediate removal. Over time, I think we should consider retiring older appliances as the stove or chimney reaches the end of its useful life or no longer meets modern emissions standards. Other jurisdictions have used gradual approaches based on appliance age, emissions performance or property transfer. I think those models are worth examining before Cumberland develops its own approach.
Troy Therrien	Didn't reply	
Ellain Bell	Didn't reply	
Sean Sullivan	Yes	
Neil Borecky	Didn't reply	
Nick Ward		My aim would be to reduce the number of homes that rely on wood as their primary heat source. For a few people with access to a cheap or free wood supply, using a woodstove can be a way to reduce costs, but for everyone who needs to buy wood from a local supplier, the cost is now dramatically higher than running an electric heat pump. If the province or federal government can continue to subsidize or incentivize heat pump installation for low income homes and rental units, people can enjoy the benefits of cheap heating and cooling, leaving the woodstove for the rare power outages and those evenings when a fire would be nice.

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?

Cumberland

Name	Answer	Comments
<i>Mayoral candidates</i>		
Vickey Brown	Didn't reply	
<i>Councillor candidates</i>		
Zanoni Agnew	Didn't reply	
Kevin Snaden		I would focus first on the sources of smoke that have the greatest impact on neighbouring homes. That means better education about burning properly seasoned wood, maintaining a hot and efficient fire rather than allowing it to smoulder throughout the night, maintaining stoves and chimneys, and ensuring people do not burn garbage, wet branches or other inappropriate material. Cumberland's moisture-meter program is a good example of practical education. I would also support examining whether periodic stove or chimney inspections could improve both fire safety and air quality. Cumberland has limited bylaw-enforcement capacity, so any new regulation needs to be realistic to administer and enforce. Older conventional wood stoves can produce far more particulate pollution than modern certified appliances. Over time, I would support gradually retiring the oldest equipment, particularly in denser areas where smoke from one property can affect many neighbours. I support existing incentives that help residents switch to cleaner heating. My own wood stove has been removed, I currently heat with electric baseboards, and I am considering installing a heat pump. I do not think the goal should be to suddenly tell long-time Cumberland residents that they cannot burn wood. The goal should be a predictable transition toward cleaner heating, cleaner burning and less impact.
Troy Therrien	Didn't reply	
Sean Sullivan	Didn't reply	
Neil Borecky	Didn't reply	
Nick Ward		As for the previous question, I'd seek ways to incentivize the installation and use of electrical heat pumps for heating and cooling in existing homes, to make space in the 'carrying capacity' of our winter atmosphere and allow for less frequent woodstove use.
Ellaine Bell	Didn't reply	