



## What is Climate-First: A Suggested Definition

### Background

On June 22, 2020, District of Sooke Council approved the Climate Action Committee 2020 Work Plan, which included the Global Goals:

*In recognition of Council's declaration of a climate emergency in the District of Sooke and that climate be a priority to Strategic Planning:*

- *Ensure a "climate first" approach in all municipal decision-making and planning processes, including the Official Community Plan, and the inclusion of climate expertise on consulting teams.*
- *Develop a comprehensive Sooke Climate Action Plan which will include mitigation and adaptation strategies.*

On September 14, 2020, Transition Sooke made a presentation to council, which called for climate action to be the over-arching theme of the OCP. Council referred the matter to staff and the OCP Advisory Committee (Transition Sooke will address Advisory Committee on February 25, 2021).

On October 26, 2020, Council amended the Climate Action Committee global goal by striking the first bullet point and replacing it with:

- *Provide a definition of "green lens/climate first" for use in all municipal decision making and planning processes.*

We are unclear if staff is currently working on a definition, however we would like to suggest some basic ideas of what "Climate-First" means for municipalities.

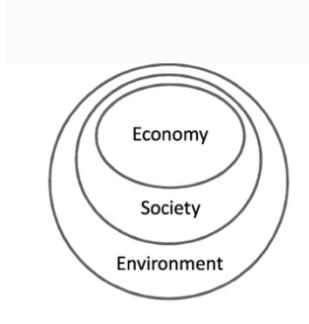
### Preamble

At a number of recent Council meetings, Sooke has referenced a "triple-bottom-line" approach to address actions and policies in the OCP and other district initiatives. The triple-bottom-line approach to sustainability is problematic. The notion that environment, economy and society can be treated separately and that there is a "trade-off" approach to attain sustainability is not appropriate, especially when the environmental threat is the Climate Emergency. There is also a tendency to always put economics first.

The classic model of sustainability, which aligns with the triple-bottom-line approach is the three intersecting circles:



A more realistic approach, and one that is consistent with “Climate-First” is as follows:



In short, you can’t have a society or an economy if you don’t have an environment. Hence, you must address Climate Change first.

The Climate Emergency challenges us to manage a different set of numbers. First and foremost, we must reduce GHGs and increase natural carbon sinks in a “Climate-First” effort to reach our goals. This is not a choice — it is an imperative.

This doesn’t mean that social and economic needs should go unmet. It does mean that while meeting the social and economic needs of Sooke citizens, we must also honour our climate commitment to residents and the environment of Sooke, BC, Canada and the world.

## Suggested Definition

**Climate-First:** Meeting the GHG reduction target is the first priority in all municipal policy and plans.

**Climate-First Operating Principle:** Address all matters of civic concern by first locating them within the overall context of the Climate Emergency.

## What does Climate First mean for local governments?

In all municipal policy, the priority will be to drastically reduce GHGs while at the same time, increase the climate resiliency of our communities and environment. Our calculation, based on CRD data and reports, estimate the reduction required is approximately 82 per cent.

- Governments must embrace a low-carbon economy as the means to a sustainable future.

- Municipal funds will be invested in projects that decrease GHGs or that increase our resiliency to climate change.
- Municipal government will meet the basic needs of residents without sacrificing the safety and resiliency of younger generations to the effects of climate change.

### **How will municipal governments use Climate-First to reach GHG targets?**

Climate-First means that each new development project, land-use designation, zoning, asset management, community infrastructure, or other municipal-level policies and plans must be assessed for such things as:

1. Mitigation
  - a) Embodied carbon (manufacture and transportation of materials)
  - b) Carbon emissions produced in construction building construction, site prep, waste, etc.
  - c) Loss of carbon sink and other environmental services (removal of soils, trees and other vegetation)
  - d) Carbon emissions from long-term operations
2. Adaptation
  - a) Flood and drought impacts
  - b) Local food security
  - c) Temperature extremes
  - d) Exposure to smoke from forest fires
  - e) Emergency systems in place

### **How will Climate-First be implemented?**

The District of Sooke needs a staff member dedicated to Climate Action to:

1. Draft a Climate Action Plan that is consistent with the framework developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in its “Partners for Climate Protection.” Sooke, along with more than 350 municipalities across Canada is one of the partners. The framework is based on five Milestones:
  - a) Create a Baseline Emissions Inventory and Forecast
  - b) Set Emissions Reduction Targets
  - c) Develop a Local Action Plan
  - d) Implement the Local Action Plan
  - e) Monitor Progress and Report Results
2. Report regularly to council on progress in putting Climate-First and meeting GHG targets. Details of such assessments (including data and data sources) need to be made public.
3. Find funds for projects to help meet the targets, and to work with other departments in reducing GHGs.