

IS BALANCE POSSIBLE IN A BOOMTOWN ECONOMY? BARRIERS TO CLIMATE ACTION IN RESOURCE-BASED COMMUNITIES

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Master of Science
in
Urban & Regional Planning
University of Alberta

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global changes to climate over the last six decades have been putting growing strain on cities through increased climate change impacts. Local action is often considered to be most effective at addressing climate impacts and mitigating future warming, however, varied and interdependent factors across scales of governance stand as barriers to climate action and can impede progress at the local level.

This research assesses the unique barriers to climate action in resource-based communities, focusing on the two largest municipalities in the province of Alberta – Edmonton and Calgary. Alberta is currently the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Canada and has been described as a *reluctant actor* on climate change. Edmonton and Calgary have economies heavily reliant upon oil and gas but have also in recent years adopted climate change mitigation and adaptation plans with the stated goal of building resilience to climate change.

Despite significant action on policy development, both Edmonton and Calgary have experienced setbacks in implementation and have failed to meet GHG emissions reduction targets. An assessment of relevant policy and strategic documents from each of the two cities revealed a strong analytical framework for assessing future impacts and vulnerability as well as a prioritization of flexibility and redundancy in climate initiatives and policy development. However, both cities struggle with equitable approaches to climate action and require ongoing engagement with a diverse representation of their populations. Most critically, the cities struggle to commit

ongoing funding to their proposed initiatives. Both cities rely heavily on the provincial and federal governments for funding but, despite greater responsibility handed down from the province, lack the necessary powers to create and manage the financial resources necessary for comprehensive climate action.

A more collaborative approach to governance is needed between the province of Alberta and its two major cities. Yet long-standing economic and political ties to the oil and gas industry, appear to disincentivize provincial action for fear of negative economic impacts on the province's largest economy. Conservative ideology will hinder long-term resilience for Albertans and new approaches to local climate action are required for transformative change. Climate action must be mainstreamed throughout municipal policies and resilience must be normalized and prioritized as a consideration in future development and planning. Comprehensive climate action in resource-based communities will require immediate and ongoing commitments to learning, adaptation, and transformation.