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Barriers and enablers to the adoption of buildings and energy efficiency initiatives in Greater Victoria

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Key messages

- Focus group participants identify funding from provincial and federal governments as adequate and as enabling alongside staffing interactions.
- Staffing resources, the legislative, regulatory and political environment alongside governance and information and data management were identified as both barriers and enablers.
- Political will and information exchange enable existing climate action, but municipalities lack of autonomy over the most effective policy instruments.

Importance: Understanding barriers and enablers to climate action at the working level

This study explores the barriers and enablers to municipal climate action through focus groups with 11 municipal and Capital Regional District staff members across Greater Victoria, British Columbia. Municipalities enforce the building code for structures raised within their boundaries. They are also building owners and control municipal assets such as recreation centres and local government council buildings. Buildings account for 40 % of GHG emissions in the Capital Regional District, with most of these coming from space and water heating with fossil fuels (Pinna Consulting for CRD, 2021). These emissions come from both new and existing buildings, meaning that reductions in GHG emissions can occur through retrofits and in new construction of buildings to higher energy standards. Municipalities have influence on these standards by participating in and promoting provincial retrofitting programs, and by implementing the BC Energy Step Code and the BC Zero Carbon Step Code for new construction.

Opportunities and barriers

Six categories of barriers and enablers were identified through the focus groups: funding, staffing, legislation/regulation, governance, information, and politics, with the first categories representing a form of government capacity (see Table below).

The buildings and energy efficiency focus group participants did not view *funding* as a barrier as both the Federal and provincial governments are providing funding for these initiatives. *Staffing resources* were viewed as both barrier and enabler. Larger municipalities, like Saanich and Victoria, have in-house expertise; smaller municipalities have little to no policy capacity. Officials from the buildings and energy and waste groups saw an unwillingness to innovate and to be flexible within the private sector as a barrier. Examples were haulage and HVAC installation companies. Interaction between staff, within and across municipalities, is highly developed and collaborative. In all groups, it was seen as an enabler.

Identification of barriers and enablers: Buildings & Energy	
<i>Funding</i>	Enabler
<i>Staffing resources</i>	Barrier and enabler
<i>Staffing interaction</i>	Enabler
<i>Legislation/regulation</i>	Barrier and enabler
<i>Governance</i>	Barrier and enabler
<i>Information and data management</i>	Barrier and enabler
<i>Politics: public opinion and political leadership</i>	Barrier and enabler

Legislation and regulation was similarly seen as both barrier and enabler by the buildings and energy group. While officials welcomed the changes to provincial codes requiring more stringent standards, they also regarded their lack of ability to apply those codes to existing buildings as a barrier. *Governance* was perceived as both a barrier and an enabler. Greater Victoria’s numerous municipalities were seen as a barrier to consistent and efficient climate policy. The regional growth strategy reflects this disunity and was described as “having no teeth.” Other officials were more positive about the governance structure, seeing it either as neutral or an enabler. The CRD plays a coordinating role, particularly in running the Climate Action Intermunicipal Work-

ing Group; municipalities also coordinate with each other and use each other's experiences with policy and program implementation as informal pilot projects. *Information and data management* were viewed as a barrier and enabler for climate action. Inconsistent and unclear modelling requirements when reporting emissions data and applying for grants is a barrier for local governments in their vertical relationship with both federal and provincial governments. Small municipalities do not have the *capacity* to engage in such detailed data analysis. The *political environment* was described as both a barrier and enabler. Officials discussed the difference between perceived and actual opposition to policies.

Policy implications

Buildings and energy efficiency in British Columbia exist in a complex interplay of provincial and municipal initiatives and funding structures. Changes to the BC Building Code took place as a result of stipulations in the CleanBC climate action plan and resulted in the Zero Carbon Step Code being added to the BC Building Step Code. The province has chosen regulatory instruments to increase building efficiency and to reduce GHG emissions from buildings. Rebates are the instrument of choice in lowering energy emissions and creating greater energy efficiencies in existing privately-owned dwellings. These rebates require significant initiative on the part of the homeowner, as well as sufficient money to pay for improvements up front and wait for repayment from the province or the federal government and exclude the large number of existing rental buildings in British Columbia. Renters, who may be paying high bills for heating, have no control over retrofits to the space they are renting. Municipalities have no mechanisms to compel landlords, or indeed homeowners, to retrofit for energy efficiency. They can wave carrots and make sermons, but do not have sticks to brandish.

Of the three types of instruments that are used —regulations, economic measures and information— the province controls most of the regulations and economic measures, leaving the municipalities of Greater Victoria with inadequate or inappropriate access to both. Political will and information exchange enable existing climate action, but municipalities lack autonomy over the most effective policy instruments. Provincial funding similar to the Local Government Climate Action Program needs to be ramped up to enable municipal climate action in a rapid manner.

Note: This Energy Brief summarizes research from the following thesis:

- Masemann, C. E. (2023). Getting the Job Done: Understanding Barriers and Enablers to Municipal Climate Action in Greater Victoria (Masters thesis). Accessible from: <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/items/d172834d-ff6a-4fdb-a598-c28437051fb6>

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Pinna Consulting for CRD. (2021). CRD Climate Action Strategy—Taking Action on the Climate Emergency. Capital Regional District.