



**ATTUNING TO CLIMATE:  
WALKING, LISTENING, ACTING**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Prepared by:



**JUST POWERS**

**2024**

## Overview

“Attuning to Climate: Walking, Listening, Acting,” a symposium organized by the University of Alberta's [Just Powers](#) team in collaboration with the City of Edmonton, brought together over 100 City employees, elected officials, artists, Indigenous knowledge holders, and researchers from the University of Alberta and other academic institutions across Canada and the US. Together, participants shared diverse knowledges and expertise, all of which are needed to facilitate cultural shifts necessary for responding meaningfully to the ongoing climate crisis. The symposium, which took place from October 16 to 18, 2024, marked the beginning of the Canada-based portion of “Walking the Talk: Climate Moves,” a multi-year collaboration between the University of Alberta and the City of Edmonton that aims to make every decision a climate decision.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Note that this is part of a larger SSHRC and Mitacs funded research initiative, under the banner of *Just Powers*, that involved an international collaboration with a U.S.-based mirror-lab community doing similar experiential, land-based, epistemological recovery work in Newton Kansas, United States.

## Context

In 2019, The City Of Edmonton declared a climate emergency, marking a pivotal moment in its commitment to addressing climate change. Now, as it moves forward in a post-pandemic world, it is reaffirming this commitment by prioritizing the transformation of its internal workplace culture. The goal is to ensure that employees recognize that every decision is, in fact, a climate decision. This cultural shift is at the heart of Edmonton's broader strategy to tackle climate action in meaningful ways. To drive this effort, the City has partnered with the *Just Powers* team to explore climate and energy transition as fundamentally a social and cultural challenge.

As co-organizer Dr. Sheena Wilson explained, "climate change is a symptom," not the cause of the compounding crises this century. "Climate change is the fallout of colonialism and capitalism" (Wilson 2022). Climate change is the result of broken relationality (Wilson 2022). Knowing this, how do we change the way we relate to the world around us and the ways we think about climate action? The SSHRC-funded collaboration

"Walking the Talk: Climate Moves" and the recent symposium "Attuning to Climate: Walking, Listening, Acting" explore place-based knowledge and walking as a first climate action that can inspire other actions: other ways of thinking about how we live and work now and how we'd like to create new habits and policies moving into the future. Questions explored include: How can embodied and experiential learning reshape how we make decisions in the City of Edmonton? How do we change the way we move, learn and play at the City of Edmonton to be responsive at the pace of climate change itself?

Just transition cannot rely on technological shifts alone. The adoption of any technology is social-cultural, a matter of shifting what we do and why we do it. For transition to be equitable and just, new technologies need to be paired with broader cultural shifts that focus on relations with our local environment, other humans, and other-than-human beings. This project thus foregrounds cross-sectoral respect- and relationship building that allows for communities to co-construct and articulate their understandings of climate justice and the value-shifts needed to achieve a full scale transition that succeeds only at the level of meeting basic decarbonization metrics.

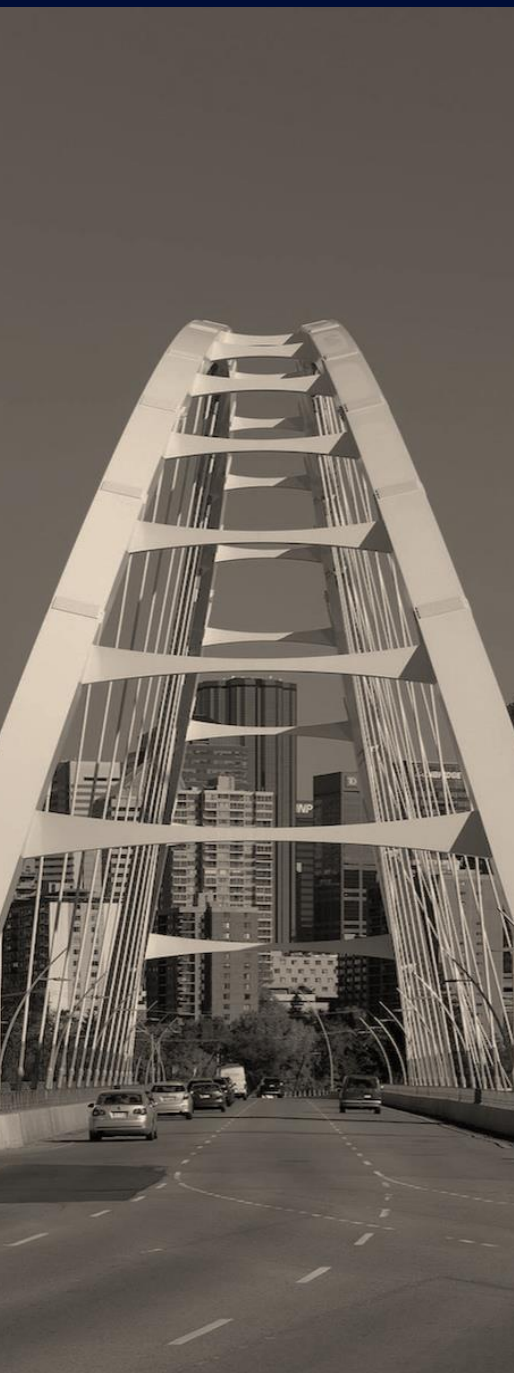


# Questions

1. How can embodied and experiential learning reshape how we make decisions in the City of Edmonton?
2. How do we change the way we move, learn and play at the City of Edmonton to be responsive at the pace of climate change itself?

## Interdisciplinary and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

Given the project's central premise that the energy transition underway can only be adequate to the complexities of the climate crisis if it involves meaningful cultural shifts (reflected through a transformation of values, habits, policies and laws), the symposium's approach was transdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and holistic. This was reflected in the diversity of symposium events, activities, and presentations, which included talks, hands-on workshops, art installations, and walks.





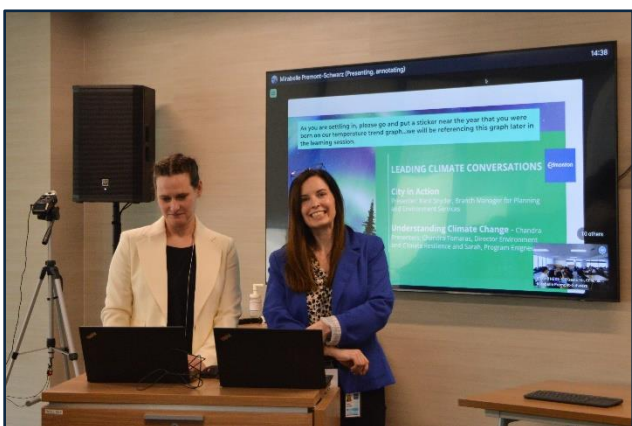
## Presentations

From the City of Edmonton, Kent Snyder discussed the work of the City's Climate Task Force, Alberto Atlamirano discussed the city's Carbon Budget, Heather Wheeliker, Barbara Daly, and Lisa Dockman shared examples of successful community activation around climate change, particularly around energy poverty, climate equity, and communities of practice, and Livia Balone and Sincy Modayil explored the place of climate in professional policies and codes of ethics.



## Hands-on Activities and Workshops

City of Edmonton employees Sarah Cicchini and Chandra Tomaras led a workshop that guided participants through the data that captures the impacts and costs of climate change in Edmonton. Tracy Stafford's talk, which included a meditation and breathing exercise, emphasized the relationship of people's health and well-being with the well-being of the planet. Emilie O'Brien, an MFA student and curator from Concordia University (Montreal), led a bilateral drawing workshop; this somatic art therapy technique provided participants with an opportunity to calm their nervous systems and shift from analytical thinking to more intuitive ways of knowing as they attuned to themselves and the environment.



# Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Leadership

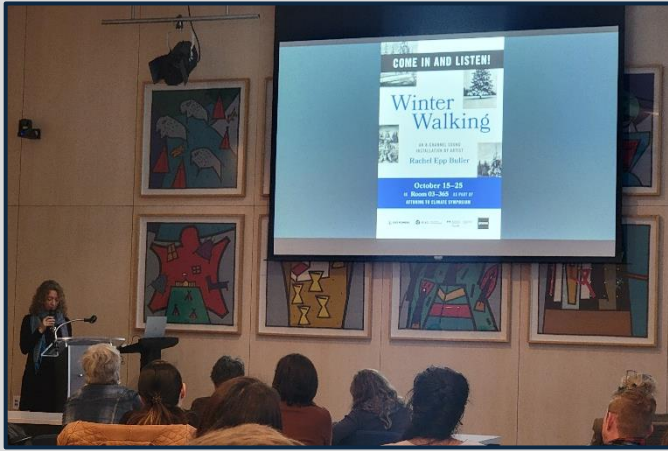
*“Indigenous work needs to be at the heart of this work - climate change has not been caused by 'humans' in general, but particular ways of conceptualizing and relating to this planet and each other.” - Survey Respondent*

To start in a good way and set the tone for the multi-year collaboration, Elder Bob Cardinal and Oskapiw led a pipe ceremony for the organizing team and leadership members on the first day of the symposium. In their walks in Kinsmen Park on the Wednesday and Thursday, Dr. Dwayne Donald (Papaschase) and Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack (Saddle Lake) shared stories of Indigenous

relationships with the land and people of Amiskwaciwâskahikan both in the present and since time immemorial. Walking in the same place with different knowledge holders allowed participants to see the same space through different eyes, layering knowledge and learning about the importance of being in good relationship with the land.

## Embodied Practices and Walking as Method

Cultural shifts necessary to address and adapt to climate change cannot be achieved only by thinking. Embodied practices, including walking, allow us to attune to climate differently, to see climate change in the local world around us. Tracy Stafford's short talk and breathing practice were selected by those respondents who attended her talk as one of the most useful and/or enjoyable sessions, suggesting that the slow practice is appreciated. The slow practice of caring for oneself demonstrates how closely related self care and care for the planet are.



In her keynote address, “Walking as Climate Action,” Rachel Epp Buller further demonstrated how she uses walking in her artistic and teaching practices. She shared how different communities have used walking as a method of listening, to connect with one another, learn from each other, and witness with care the effects of changing climate in local contexts.



The guided walks by Dwayne Donald and Lana Whiskeyjack provided participants with a similar experience of attuning to the same place from different perspectives. The upcoming walking series will build on these practices and insights to help City of Edmonton employees further attune to what climate justice might look like in Edmonton from different perspectives (e.g., native plants, medicine plants, rough living, sound walks).

# Conclusions

During an impromptu workshop on the last day of the symposium, participants shared the following major learnings and takeaways from the symposium:

- All knowledges - scientific, embodied, artistic, experiential, land-based - are needed for climate justice, a healthy planet, and a just future.
- Change is made together and happens at the conditional pace of trust.
- As climate change is intrinsically connected to colonization and other structures of oppression, so is climate justice intrinsically related to reconciliation and decolonization.
- We need to stay with “the trouble” and tensions to make real progress.
- Walking is a form of stewardship, and walking produces the conditions necessary for attunement to personal and planetary health.
- Cities are powerful: what unites us is stronger than what divides us at the local, city level.
- *How we think about who we are matters greatly.*



# What Next?

Our partnership with the City of Edmonton continues. *Walking the Talk: Climate Moves* is part of a two-year project funded by Mitacs Elevate, titled *Walking on Just Transition: City of Edmonton Change(s) for Climate*. The initiative aims to educate city employees on the importance of climate justice as the foundation for addressing climate change. Dr. Sheena Wilson, the academic lead and Dr. Caroline Bomfim, postdoctoral fellow on this project, emphasize that achieving climate justice is key to confronting the climate crisis, and this education will help ensure this understanding becomes deeply rooted within the organization.

The project will focus on shifting the city's organizational culture. By fostering cross-departmental collaboration, employees will better understand the impact of their daily decisions and how these intersect with broader environmental and social challenges. We will continue with walks, lunch-and-learns, as well as lectures, guided interviews, curriculum development - essentially using participatory action research and climate communication strategies to engage employees in co-creating solutions for both the climate crisis and the city's goals.

Furthermore, the project will track cultural shifts within the city, documenting best practices, challenges, and locally generated knowledge. These findings will serve as resources for other organizations and municipalities working toward similar transformative change.



## The Organizing Team

Dr. Sheena Wilson (University of Alberta)  
Dr. Rachel Epp Buller (Bethel College, Kansas)  
Malou Brouwer (University of Alberta)  
Meredith Snyder (University of Alberta)  
Jordan Ashworth (University of Alberta)  
Dr. Caroline Bomfim (City of Edmonton & University of Alberta)  
Mirabelle Prémont-Schwarz (City of Edmonton)  
Wai Tse Ramirez (City of Edmonton)  
Chandra Tomaras (City of Edmonton)

**Thank you to all the presenters  
and participants!**



Email address:  
[climate.moves@ualberta.ca](mailto:climate.moves@ualberta.ca)



Website:  
<https://www.justpowers.ca/projects/>



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