

Summary of Learnings about Zero Carbon Step Code in the VICC Region

The Zero Carbon Step Code is a new regulation that allows local governments to limit carbon emissions from new buildings in their communities. Zero Carbon Step Code (ZCSC) has become a hot topic for communities in the VICC region with momentum and community support being generated but also misinformation and opposition. On Vancouver Island, the municipalities of Victoria, Saanich, Central Saanich, Nanaimo, and View Royal as well as CRD electoral areas have already adopted ZCSC. Several others are in various stages of the process.

The recent Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Climate Action Network (VICC-CAN)¹ meeting on October 3, 2023 featured a presentation from Stand.Earth on the ZCSC and a roundtable discussion about the ZCSC experience across the VICC region. The purpose of the discussion was to better understand the experience of communities that have gone through the process already, supports available for communities considering adopting ZCSC, and how communities can support one another regionally. While the focus was on ZCSC, the challenge speaks to the wider debate about the future of energy in BC and how local governments can communicate around these issues.

Key learnings:

A number of key learnings were shared during the discussion. Here is what we heard was helpful from staff in communities that have adopted ZCSC:

- Having a clear mandate and direction from council/board and elected champions
- Support from elected officials in other communities, especially when facing opposition
- Seeing other communities lead and having the opportunity to learn from their experience
- Access to shared resources (e.g. reports from communities that have previously adopted)
- Having access to good information and resources
- Making resources available to council/board
- Being prepared to respond to questions and counter common misconceptions

¹ The Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Climate Action Network (VICC-CAN) is a regional peer network open to local government staff from municipalities, regional districts, and Indigenous communities across the VICC region. The objective of the network is to support climate mitigation and adaptation across the region by promoting the sharing of climate action-related knowledge, providing space for the discussion and leveraging of opportunities, identifying opportunities for collaborative implementation, and providing opportunities for staff to give and receive feedback to various levels of government, including liaising with the VICC-CL Steering Committee.

Zero Carbon Step Code presentation from Stand.Earth

[View the presentation slides](#)

Sunil Singal from Stand.Earth presented an overview of the ZCSC and some of the common challenges that are being seen on the ground. Stand.Earth provides direct support to governments, communications and media, grassroots organizing, and legal analysis and research. Roughly 12 local governments across BC including five on Vancouver Island have already adopted ZCSC and another dozen are upcoming. Challenges have included lobbying from the oil and gas industry along with a number of common misconceptions. To counter these narratives, it is recommended to avoid the word “ban” and focus on electrification, communicate about cost and reliability, and talk about the health, safety, and equity aspects – especially cooling and air quality.

Further Resources

General resources:

- BC Government: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023ENV0030-000653>
- Help Cities Lead: <https://www.helpcitieslead.ca/contact/zero-carbon-step-code/>
- Canadian Climate Institute: <https://climateinstitute.ca/reports/heat-pumps-canada/>
- Joint industry letter: <https://www.pembina.org/pub/joint-industry-letter-bc-municipal-councils>
- Stand.Earth letter: <https://www.safecities.earth/ubcm-zero-carbon-step-code/>

VICC local government webpages and FAQs:

- RDN project webpage: <https://www.getinvolved.rdn.ca/regional-net-zero-strat>
- Nanaimo FAQ: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/green-initiatives/bc-energy-step-code-and-zero-carbon-code>
- Saanich ZCSC webpage: <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/community/sustainable-saanich/bc-energy-step-code-and-carbon-pollution-standard.html>
- Saanich FAQ: <https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/Planning/sustainability/Step-Code-FAQ.pdf>
- Victoria Low Carbon New Buildings webpage: <https://www.victoria.ca/community-culture/climate-action/climate-friendly-homes/low-carbon-new-buildings>
- Victoria FAQ: <https://www.victoria.ca/media/file/bc-energy-step-code-and-zcsc-faq-ddxpdf>