

# Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA) 10 Year Anniversary Report

## A Decade of Transformative Climate Action



### A message from our Executive Director

In honor of the 10th Anniversary of the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA), I am pleased to share this 10th Anniversary Report, “A Decade of Transformative Climate Action.” This report showcases highlights from our 10 years supporting our members’ progress in advancing a just and carbon neutral future and reflects CNCA’s evolution as we continue to learn and grow in response to our changing world and the increasingly urgent need for action. It is intended for our members at the core of our mission, our partners in the philanthropic community who have shown tremendous commitment to the special value of CNCA, and prospective partners keen to learn about this unique community.

The groundwork for CNCA was laid through a process of stocktaking and deep reflection by leading global practitioners and philanthropic partners. CNCA was officially launched in 2015 by a group of dedicated global cities who share a commitment to cutting emissions by 80 percent or more by 2050 or sooner. That commitment, and our network, have since grown and we are now 23 global cities strong charging towards a climate positive future and working harder than ever to prioritize transformative climate action that achieves prosperity, social equity, resilience, and a better quality of life for all on a thriving planet.

Over the past 10 years, CNCA has evolved into one of the world’s foremost member-driven, practitioner-led climate organizations created by cities for cities. CNCA member cities are globally influential, have demonstrated deep carbon reductions, and are vocal leaders and risk takers in the climate arena. Our membership is composed of the Climate/Sustainability leads in each city, who set the strategic direction and work priorities for CNCA.



**CNCA**  
CARBON NEUTRAL CITIES ALLIANCE

CNCA's member cities have demonstrated a deep commitment to reaching carbon neutrality well ahead of national and international targets, often navigating changing political tides. They lead the field, charting new pathways, opening up new policy areas and working across levels of government to tackle emissions far beyond those produced within city or even regional boundaries.

And yet, it can be challenging for cities to fund innovation, which by its nature is risky. One of CNCA's core areas of support is to help buy down that risk by providing funding for transformative projects. With continued support from our generous partners, over the past decade CNCA has funded 76 total awards, comprising an investment of more than \$4.9M, which in turn has leveraged an additional \$46M to support continuing climate work.

By supporting innovation, creating a space for cities to spur new ideas, and highlighting the most impactful approaches, CNCA catalyzes and encourages bold climate action that demonstrates the "art of the possible."

For example, CNCA's pioneering work in the built environment has catalyzed a cohort of 15 European cities that have adopted cutting edge embodied carbon policies; CNCA's food systems "game changer" projects have spawned a transatlantic cohort of 16 cities spearheading the decarbonization of urban food systems; and CNCA's climate justice programming has supported projects that take an increasingly participatory approach to climate action in 11 member cities.

Together, we are working across cities, networks and industries to build coalitions of stakeholders who share our goals and can help scale these efforts in their respective regions and countries. While we celebrate all that we have achieved we draw inspiration from this courageous leadership to address the challenges that lie ahead.

Simone Mangili  
Executive Director  
CNCA



**Founding members of CNCA meet in Copenhagen in 2014**



**CNCA Annual Meeting in Stockholm, 2024**

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# What We Do at CNCA

CNCA member cities have set some of the most ambitious carbon reduction targets imaginable and they do this knowing that achieving these goals will require radical, transformative changes to core city systems.



We take this opportunity to thank our philanthropic partners for their invaluable support in advancing our mission, allowing us to engage our member cities in this vital work.

**Mission:** CNCA's mission is to mobilize transformative climate action in cities in order to achieve prosperity, social equity, resilience and better quality of life for all on a thriving planet.

## Current Philanthropic Partners



The  
Summit  
Foundation



Rockefeller  
Brothers Fund  
Philanthropy for an Interdependent World

THE  
KRESGE  
FOUNDATION



V.KANN RASMUSSEN FOUNDATION

Laudes ———  
Foundation



Barr  
Foundation

McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

## Past Philanthropic Partners

BULLITT  
FOUNDATION



THE  
KENDEDA  
FUND



BLACKSTONE  
RANCH INSTITUTE



The Minor Foundation  
for Major Challenges



THE  
CHRISTOPHER  
REYNOLDS  
FOUNDATION  
Inc.

TONI PIËCH  
FOUNDATION

seedfund



CATENA  
FOUNDATION

GARFIELD FOUNDATION

Our members have set the following strategic goals to guide CNCA's work in support of their efforts to achieve truly just futures:

1. Fostering peer learning among climate vanguard cities so they can learn from each other and go further and faster together.
2. Prioritizing a just carbon neutral future by integrating climate justice into ambitious climate action.
3. Funding transformative climate action to mobilize the development, adoption, and implementation of game-changing climate policies in cities.
4. Advancing methodologies, standards, and governance tools for carbon neutrality planning, implementation, impact measurement, and continuous improvement.
5. Exerting collective influence on and advocating for policies from other decision-makers to reduce emissions not directly controlled by cities.
6. Cultivating transformational leadership to enable city sustainability directors to excel in their roles as change-makers.
7. Helping cities communicate more effectively to advance their carbon neutrality work.



**Site visit in Seattle during 2022 Regional Annual Meeting**



**2023 Annual Meeting, Toronto**



**2019 Embodied Carbon Meeting, Pocantico, New York**

# Strategic Goal 1: Foster Peer Learning

CNCA fosters peer learning among its member cities to support the exchange of ideas and best practices in achieving our climate goals. CNCA is unique in that its core members are top city officers at the leading edge of bold climate action and CNCA works tirelessly to curate space for these leaders to advance knowledge through collective exchange and learning. We do this through annual in-person and virtual meetings and online collaboration; through peer review of cities' climate action plans; and through the establishment of learning cohorts, for instance for cities implementing Game Changer Fund projects.

Our annual meetings are hosted by our members to support peer learning and collective action across a broad range of climate activities. These gatherings create the critical space where relationships are built, relationships that endure throughout the years and provide a solid base for extensive collaboration. It's by creating the right space for global leaders to come together, to wade through the real challenges and collectively workshop to develop ever evolving strategies, that real progress is made and the foundations are laid for ongoing and deepening lateral and multilateral engagement.

“

CNCA's peer learning model is such a great idea and an empowering experience. CNCA delivered an informative series of presentations and created a space of trust and open dialog to build community with peers. I learned so much from being part of an international group of professionals and experts working towards solutions, and through similar challenges at the same level of governance as me.

— Marianne Kingsley, Project Manager, Nature Based Climate Solutions, City of Toronto (Participant in Learning Cohort to Transform Food Systems — 2024)



**Founding Director, Johanna Partin at the 2019 Annual Meeting in Helsinki, pictured together with Deborah Burke, Sustainable Development Program Officer at Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Jessica Boehland, Senior Environment Program Officer at The Kresge Foundation, Lois DeBacker, Former Managing Director of the Environment Program at The Kresge Foundation, and Brendon Slotterback, Former Program Officer at the McKnight Foundation**

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CNCA Annual Meetings



2014 : Copenhagen  
2015 : Vancouver  
2016 : Oslo  
2017 : Melbourne

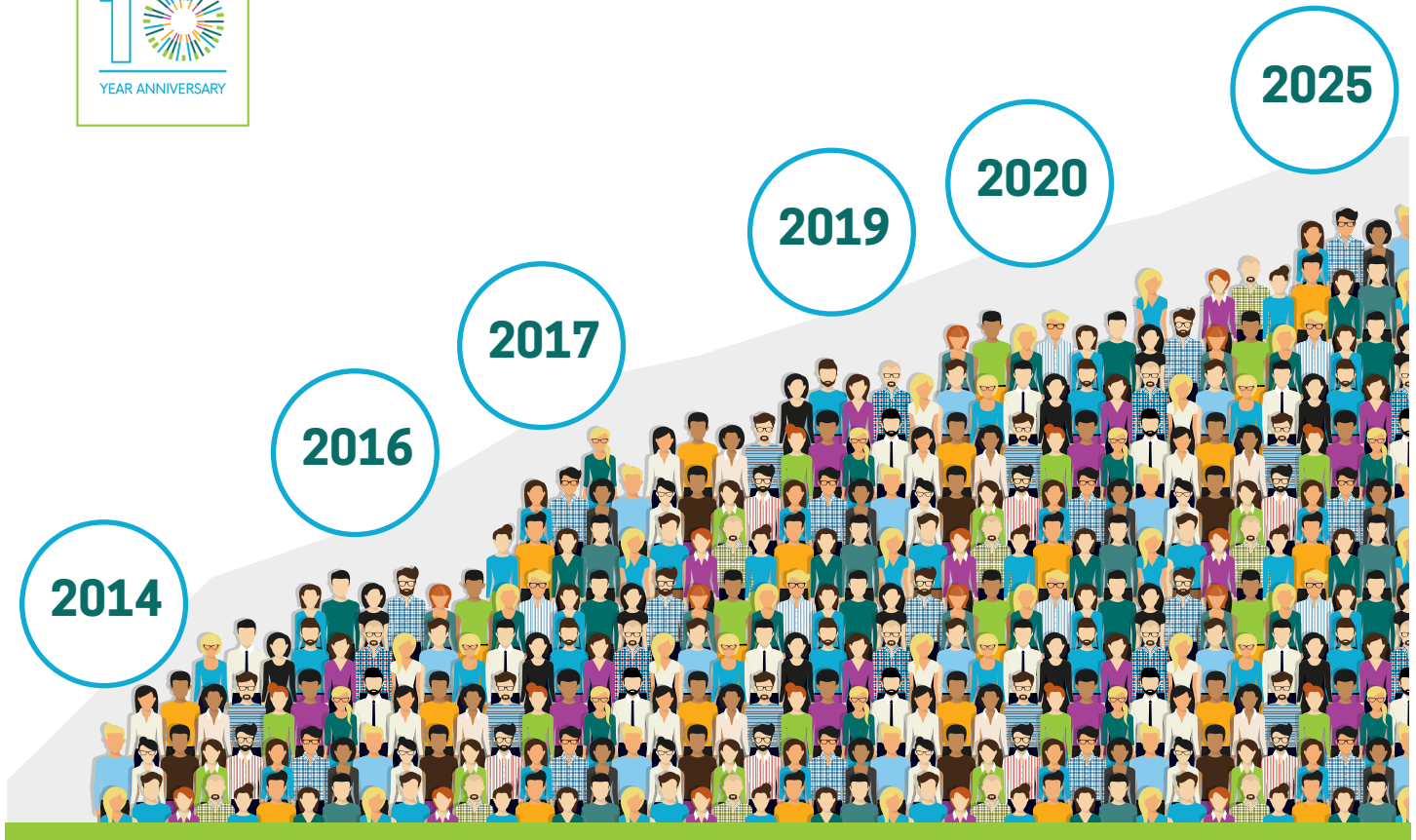
2018 : Boulder  
2019 : Helsinki  
2020-2021 : Virtual Convenings  
2022 : Regional Convenings in Seattle, Torino, Adelaide

2023 : Toronto  
2024 : Stockholm  
2025 : Glasgow





## CNCA Membership



### 2014 Founding Members

Boston, Boulder, Copenhagen , London, Melbourne, Minneapolis, NYC , Oslo, Portland, San Francisco, Seattle, Stockholm, Sydney, Vancouver, Washington, DC, Yokohama

**2016** Adelaide & Toronto

**2017** Rio de Janeiro

**2019** Amsterdam & Helsinki

**2020** Glasgow

**2025** Incheon





**Site visit during the Regional Annual Meeting in Turin, Italy in October of 2022 to the Solar District Heating Energy Plant. The site, thanks to the integration of storage systems with renewable energy production systems, avoids atmospheric emissions of approximately 8,000 tons of CO2 every year.**



**CNCA Operations and Member Services Lead, Michael Battista, and Susanna Sutherland, Fund Manager, at Annual Meeting in Stockholm, 2024**



**2022 Regional Annual Meeting in Adelaide, Australia**

“

I'd like to express my gratitude for the meeting and how CNCA and Stockholm both delivered what we as cities really need. We learn so much in these meetings - things we can not get anywhere else. Thank you for putting together an agenda that touched upon the hard questions and challenges we all face but also giving us room to discuss our challenges in a safe way.

— Iina Oilinki, Project Director, Climate Unit, City of Helsinki

# Case Study

## Getting to Net-Zero and Beyond to Climate Positive

As leading cities' ambitious climate target deadlines quickly approach, CNCA cities are defining strategies, approaches and tactics to address these residual emissions and achieve carbon neutrality, or even become carbon/climate positive.

Such strategies can be varied, ranging from multi-level carbon trading schemes to investments in carbon sequestration, carbon farming or other nature-based solutions. Carbon drawdown initiatives that increase quality of life need to be valued in ways that reflect these benefits.

Communities will be more likely to drive such investments if they are seen as essential to improving quality of life, equity and justice in the face of climate vulnerability. Increasingly, cities are adopting green infrastructure approaches that help cool cities, reduce the risk of flooding, improve air quality and more. Such approaches can help turn cities into carbon-sinks and, when connected with bioregional management efforts, can create regenerative offsets to reach carbon neutrality targets.

The workshop at the 2024 Annual Meeting in Stockholm created space for members to compare approaches in these emerging and rapidly evolving policy areas across different geographies, explore how investments are benefiting communities while regenerating nature, and identify challenges in integrating the full value of these investments into regional, national and international accounting mechanisms.



**Getting to Net Zero and Beyond Workshop, Stockholm Annual Meeting 2024**

## Strategic Goal 2: Prioritize a Just, Carbon Neutral Future

While climate change affects us all, communities of color, low-income communities, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants, refugees and other marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted. Social, economic and governance systems that exploit natural resources at unsustainable levels and perpetuate the oppression of priority communities have resulted in disproportionately negative outcomes for these priority communities. By working at the intersection of climate and social justice, CNCA is addressing these systems and advancing restorative outcomes aligned with our values of prioritizing a just carbon neutral future. Read [CNCA's full Climate Justice Statement](#).

The overarching goal of this work is to support cities in building their knowledge and experience working in collaboration with and in service to priority community leadership. By respecting and learning from community knowledge and lived experience, and supporting community leadership, climate action will reduce emissions and advance social and economic outcomes for priority communities.

### CNCA Climate Justice Statement

**CNCA is committed to a just carbon neutral future that recognizes and redresses the disproportionate burdens and disproportionate benefits of the fossil fuel economy by prioritizing climate action that advances the well-being of low-income people, Indigenous Peoples, communities of color, immigrants and refugees, and other historically marginalized communities.**

To this end, CNCA's Climate Justice programming has featured a series of cross-regional learning cohorts. Learning cohorts have included webinars that explore tools, processes and practical examples of climate justice around topics such as person-centered design strategies, collaborating with and empowering community advisory groups, equity tools, and ethical storytelling.

CNCA also supports the development of tools and resources, including the [Embodying Justice in the Built Environment](#) workbook and guide, which applies justice principles to materials resource management, new construction and offers alternatives to demolition. Designed as a workbook, it guides the user through a process which centers meaningful community engagement in considering social, economic and labor impacts and opportunities rooted in an understanding of the local historical context. CNCA members provided input and feedback during development of the workbook.



**Sydney Climate Justice Workshop, 2022**

As cities begin to consolidate pathways to rein in emissions generated across the life cycle of materials and buildings it is critical that the lived experience and well-being of communities is centered to ensure that the principles of reparative and restorative justice are embedded in climate planning and policy. CNCA is deeply committed to helping cities put theory into practice while charting new approaches in the just transition.

CNCA's Climate Justice Fund supports local projects where the city and priority community organizations are working collaboratively. Cities are not typically well funded for these sorts of projects. The funding allows experimentation and experience in new ways of working. To date, we have funded 11 projects, a few of which are spotlighted below. The lessons shared by grantees affirm the basic tenet that government does not serve priority communities well, neither through engagement processes that inform policy design nor in the distribution of benefits. In order to advance climate justice, it is critical for city staff to understand how governance, economic, and social systems perpetuate injustice locally and to challenge these dynamics in support of priority communities' climate and other priorities.



When policy makers lack a system to consider the implications of policies in their jurisdiction and greater region, they risk deprioritizing and harming both local frontline communities from development activities and distant communities who may be affected by pollution from resource extraction, manufacturing, and transportation of building materials. This workbook offers thoughtful solutions to mitigate climate change and tools to improve the quality of policy analysis with the goal of not only avoiding future injustices in the built environment, but building equity for previously marginalized communities in the planning and policy making process. It should be indispensable to any jurisdiction or community organization developing climate action plans



**Toronto Climate Justice Project.  
Canadian Climate Challenge -  
Malvern Community Challenge: A  
Collective Impact Climate Art Pilot**

— Lauren Zimmermann, Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

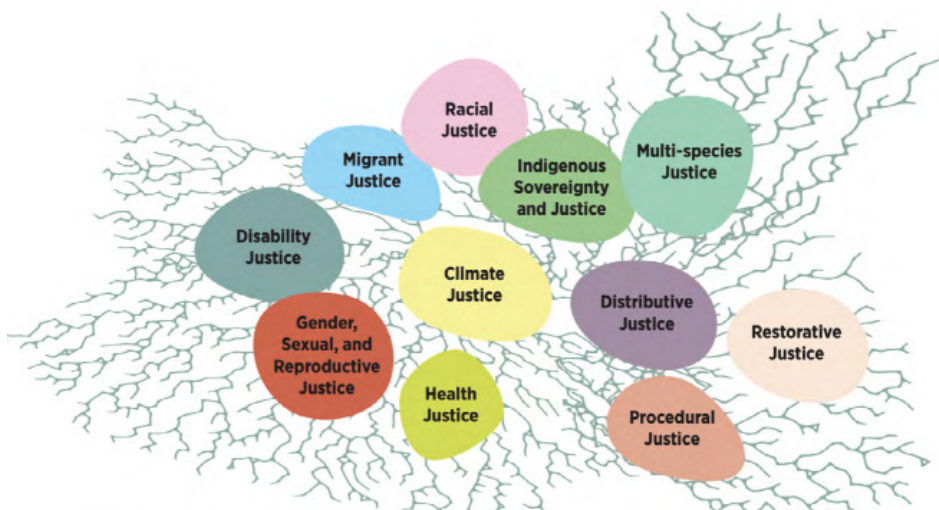
# CNCA Climate Justice Grants

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## Case Study

### The Climate Justice Field School: Power-Sharing in the Implementation of Vancouver's Climate Justice Charter

Vancouver launched a [project](#) that experimented with processes that draw from the fields of social innovation, systemic design, and equity-centered and decolonizing methods as alternatives to the City's standard policy-making, program delivery, and public engagement processes. The goal was to design and implement processes that centered collaboration, power sharing, and nurturing long-term, place-based relationships in the implementation of Vancouver's new Climate Justice Charter. Through the formation of the Climate Justice Field School, this project allowed City of Vancouver staff, community partners, and knowledge keepers to collaborate, experiment and learn their way into doing this work differently, developing new approaches to enacting just climate futures.

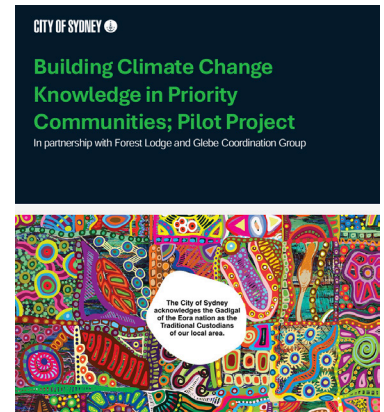


**Climate Equity Working Group (2022). A Climate Justice Charter for Vancouver. City of Vancouver**

# Case Study

## Building Climate Change Justice in Priority Communities– Sydney

The City of Sydney collaborated with a community organization created by residents of social housing areas and the Red Cross to deliver a codesigned program to equip priority communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change and build community resilience to shocks and stresses. Building climate preparedness capacity in priority communities involves understanding the stresses they are experiencing and providing the information and resources needed to strengthen their ability to anticipate, prepare for and respond to climate-related hazards and impacts. This includes developing local-level plans, engaging communities in decision-making and investing in infrastructure and policies that enhance resilience.



# Case Study

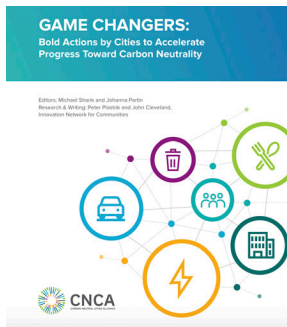
## Tool to Assess Local Climate Inequities in Copenhagen

Copenhagen launched an initiative to map climate-related inequities and to develop a [policy evaluation tool](#) to help identify imbalances and inequities in the distribution of benefits and burdens from climate initiatives. The tool is helping inform development of Copenhagen's Climate Plan 2035 and prioritization of actions that advance climate justice. The tool was informed by knowledge from local councils that represent different disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens in Copenhagen. To maximize the impact of the project, the team worked with the Danish climate city network, DK2020/Klimaalliancen (The Climate Alliance), to help ensure the tool's relevance for other Danish cities.



City of Copenhagen

# Strategic Goal 3: Fund Transformative Action in Cities



CNCA launched the Game Changer Fund to support the development, adoption and implementation of game-changing policies that aggressively shift the fundamental attributes of the systems that have caused intersecting climate, biodiversity and social crises. The Game Changer Fund empowers cities to take bold, collaborative action on climate by tackling high-impact projects that are not a good fit for traditional public funding streams.

It is not expected that any individual project will move an entire sector towards nature-positive, carbon neutrality. But an investment by the Game Changer Fund should be able to clearly articulate how the investment helps advance the fundamental redesign of climate action to regenerate nature and advance social well-being.

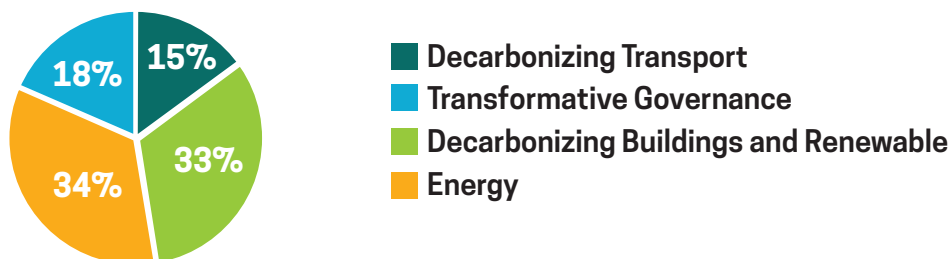
Beyond financial leverage, CNCA's Game Changer Fund has played a pivotal role in driving a collaborative approach that strengthens stakeholder capacity at the local level, equipping communities and organizations with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to address challenges sustainably and innovate effectively in their unique contexts.

Working with its philanthropic partners, CNCA offers funding opportunities for its member cities in the following fields:

**The Game Changer Fund** – supporting the development, adoption, and implementation of carbon neutralizing work in these categories: 1) decarbonizing buildings and renewable energy, 2) decarbonizing transport, 3) regenerative systems and economics, 4) transformative governance, and 5) carbon neutral districts.

**The Climate Justice Fund** – supporting cities and their partnering community-based organizations to create climate policies and programs that center the needs of priority communities.

Game Changer Fund Awards were divided between the following technical categories:



With CNCA's support and funding, cities are developing cutting-edge climate policies, and governance models that center equity and justice, addressing immediate climate challenges but also fostering long-term cultural changes in approaches to governance.

**CNCA has invested over \$5M in 76 member-led projects to date. This investment has leveraged an additional \$46M to support continuing work, garnering an 11% return on investment over time.**

# Case Study

## Adopting a Zero Emissions Standard for New Buildings – Vancouver

In 2016, Vancouver became one of the world's first cities to initiate a zero carbon-emissions standard for buildings. The need for action was clear. Vancouver's city council had committed that 100 percent of all energy used in the city would come from renewable sources by 2050.

Existing buildings were generating more than half of the city's GHG emissions. To steer the building market toward the 100 percent renewable energy goal, the city adopted a plan and a regulatory structure to put into place a new standard: by 2030, all new buildings would not emit any GHGs. Implementation of the standard by the building sector is supported by training programs, energy-modeling software, third-party verification processes, global networks of designers, builders, equipment manufacturers, and researchers who exchange information.



City of Vancouver

Vancouver's strategy went beyond issuing a new mandate to the building sector. It also supported the development of the building industry's capacity to produce zero-emissions buildings and required city government building projects to demonstrate zero-emissions approaches. Vancouver was the recipient of a Game Changer award in 2018.



City of Vancouver



# Case Study

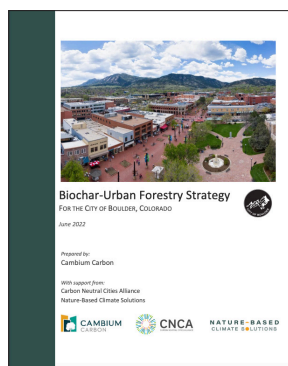
## CNCA Biochar – Urban Forestry Strategy - Boulder, Helsinki, Minneapolis, Stockholm

CNCA is working with several of its member cities to develop strategies and playbooks for urban bioenergy and biochar projects, particularly focusing on using urban forest biomass and biosolids to create biochar. This work aims to promote carbon sequestration and other environmental benefits in cities. Biochar is a carbon-rich solid resulting from the thermal decomposition of organic matter in a low or no-oxygen environment. The City of Boulder—with the cities of Helsinki, Minneapolis, and Stockholm—explored the potential for integrating biochar into urban climate action strategies. The project combined both city specific biochar and biomass assessments with additional technical assessments of biochar benefits, technical specifications, best practices for uses, and a preliminary guide to integrating equity considerations in biochar facility development.

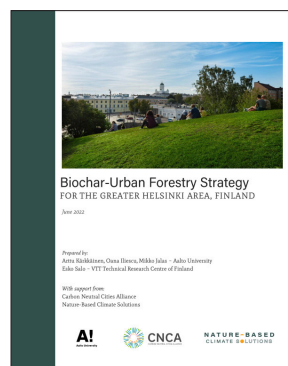
One of the outputs was the [Urban Forest Biomass to Biochar Playbook](#). Following on from this work Minneapolis has recently completed the installation of the [first urban biochar facility in North America](#). Key aspects of the work include working with cities to convert urban forest biomass (i.e. from tree removals and maintenance) into biochar; using biosolids (waste from wastewater treatment plants) to create biochar; promoting carbon sequestration in soil; and developing playbooks and strategies to support implementation of these biochar projects. CNCA member cities involved in the initiative include Boulder, Helsinki, Minneapolis, and Stockholm.

The four cities involved in the project all created urban biochar strategies - perhaps we can create an image with the covers all four of these reports rather than using the two photos below. Similar to the graphic in the following section.. The links to the four strategies are:

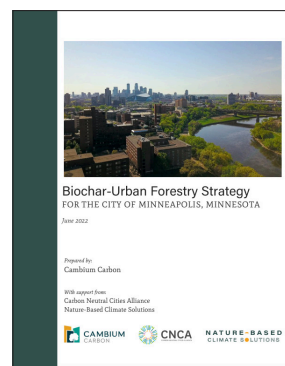
### City Biochar Strategies:



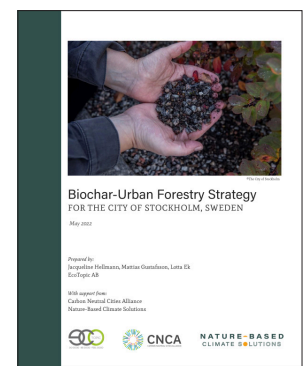
**Boulder**



**Helsinki**



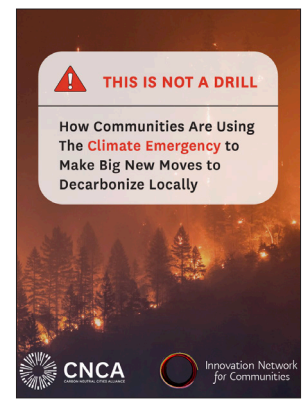
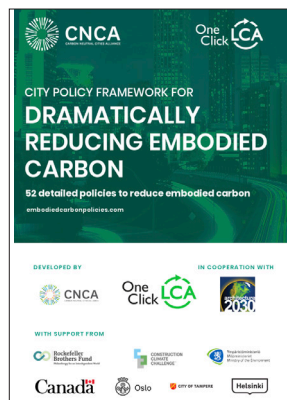
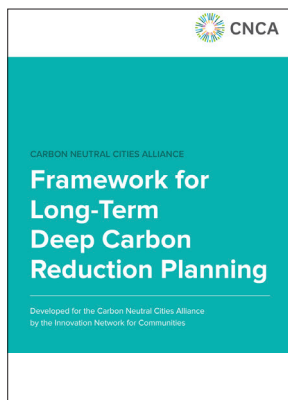
**Minneapolis**



**Stockholm**

## Strategic Goal 4: Advance Methodologies, Governance Tools and Policy Innovation

Governments are large, complex entities working to support a wide range of community needs. They are organized into departments with their own priorities and desired outcomes. The climate challenge is interdisciplinary in nature; thus, working across these divisions is essential if we are to address it effectively. Methods and tools that spread responsibility across the city administration will enhance accountability and advance systems-scale outcomes. CNCA advances methodologies, standards and governance tools for carbon neutrality planning, implementation, impact measurement and continuous improvement.



CNCA synthesizes learnings and best practices across a broad range of policy frameworks to help inform work at the local governmental level and to promote policies that support climate action across agencies and other stakeholders.

With support from the Laudes Foundation, in 2021, CNCA launched the “Dramatically Reducing Embodied Carbon in Europe” project which aims to foster widespread adoption of ambitious local, national and regional policies that will reduce embodied carbon and increase the uptake of biobased materials in the built environment in Europe. In 2022, CNCA commissioned Arup to develop a “[City Handbook for Building Carbon Neutral Buildings](#)” specifically to support cities in evaluating how to reduce whole life carbon in construction, using bio-based building materials. The handbook has been developed in close collaboration with CNCA to support policymakers and planners with technical information on the benefits of bio-based materials and the challenges, misconceptions and knowledge gaps for the application of biobased construction, as well as regulation and good practices to grow the opportunity for cities to access and utilize bio-based building materials. CNCA was pleased to join the first Buildings and Climate Global Forum in Paris in 2024 to launch this resource and demonstrate why cities are taking center stage in climate action.



# Case Study

## Consumption-Based Emissions Policy Framework

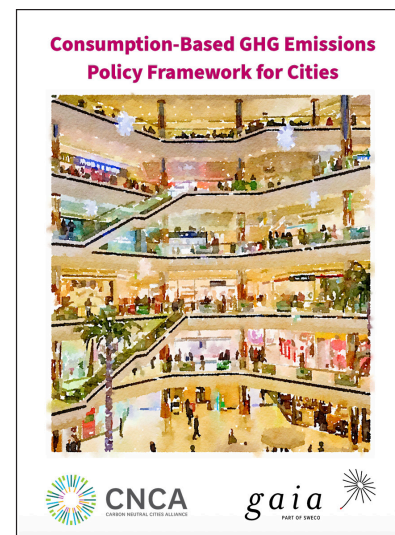
Over 80% of emissions in cities can be attributed to consumption-based emissions (CBEs)—also known as scope 3 emissions—the result of activities goods and services produced and often disposed of elsewhere yet consumed within city borders.

Electronics, fashion, and food system value chains span vast geographies, reaching well beyond the purview of municipal governance. It's often less evident how cities can track, influence and demonstrate success in reducing emissions generated across such complex value chains. Yet CNCA members are increasingly taking this challenge on through new climate actions that disrupt the status quo in favor of solutions that embrace principles of climate justice and move towards circular design, regenerative production and sustainable consumption.

CNCA is leveraging the momentum gathering around cities' scope 3 work to accelerate best practices through original research, facilitating peer learning cohorts, and supporting ambitious projects through the CNCA Game Changer Fund.

To support cities in reducing CBEs while centering equity and ensuring a just transition for all, the CNCA together with Finnish sustainability consultancy Gaia Consulting developed a policy framework.

The new [Framework](#) supports cities developing CBE inventories by outlining relevant methodologies and data sets, illustrating the pros and cons according to context and availability. The Framework synthesizes 18 recommendations and highlights policy levers with the highest potential for systemic emissions reductions that center climate justice and pursue circularity in each of the three consumption areas of food, textiles and appliances.



— “ —

CNCA's project on consumption-based emissions inventories helped us understand what we know, what we need to know and clarified next steps we need to take to tackle these emissions in a substantive way.

— Michele Crim, City of Portland, (April 2019)

# Case Study

## Learning Cohort to Transform and Decarbonize Food Systems – London, NYC, Vancouver

As part of its peer learning efforts, CNCA launched a Learning Cohort to Transform Food Systems in 2024 that brought together leaders and practitioners to exchange knowledge, explore opportunities and share new ideas to transform our food systems to be more just, sustainable and climate positive. More than 20 people representing 17 cities participated, strategizing around ways to address food waste that can contribute to higher carbon outputs. New York City shared its work to increase access to healthy, affordable and low-carbon foods for the NYC Department of Correction incarcerated population, helping improve skills among city food workers via plant-based culinary training. London shared its work in developing a replicable model for a circular food community that increases residents' consumption of low carbon food and reduces food waste. Vancouver highlighted efforts to address the limited accountability in the food supply chain to also address food waste. Collectively, these efforts are contributing to a global conversation about ways to scale and replicate strategies to decarbonize food waste and increase sustainability of healthy, culturally appropriate food options in Stockholm.

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City is working in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP) to increase access to healthy, culturally appropriate, affordable, and low-carbon foods for the NYC Department of Correction's incarcerated population, while positioning city food workers to improve their skills and advance their careers via a plant-based culinary training and certification program. The project's partner Hot Bread Kitchen trained a cohort of 80 cooks across a 5-week curriculum, and identified 7 exceptional staffers to participate in a Train the Trainer workshop, where they learned how to teach the new recipes to remaining and incoming staff. Pre and post surveys were administered and 60% of trainees stated including plant-based items on the menu was more important than before and 79% of participants stated offering healthy meals was more important. MOFP also conducted a nutritional analysis with dietitians to identify the first recipes for integration onto menus beginning January 2025. In parallel, the teams worked on the procurement contract to include plant-based protein alternatives, nutritional yeast, expanded legume options, and additional food items used in the new dishes.



**NYC Project Lowering Carbon Emissions, Upskilling Culinary Workers. The Mayor's Office of Food Policy worked with the Department of Correction and community-based organization Hot Bread Kitchen to provide a plant-based culinary certification course for approximately 120 DOC food workers**

## Strategic Goal 5: Exert Collective Influence

CNCA cities exert collective influence on other decision-makers to reduce emissions not directly controlled by cities. City action is limited by regulations that constrain their authority, a lack of incentives or requirements for private industry to decarbonize, and an economic system built on unsustainable resource extraction. Cities are thus dependent on other levels of government, regulatory agencies, and industry to achieve their carbon neutrality goals. By pooling their collective influence and resources, cities can more effectively advocate for policies and motivate other actors to accelerate a shift in their operations toward zero emissions.

CNCA supports advocacy and works to mobilize a range of partners to advance climate policy through:

- Member-driven approaches that prioritize critical policy areas where cities are held back because of policies or political dynamics at other decision-making levels.
- Development and implementation of collective influence campaigns.
- Actor mapping to identify opportunities for influence and coaching members on effective engagement strategies.

In addition, CNCA participates in a number of global events, hosting workshops and delivering presentations to help disseminate learnings and policy frameworks. For example, we participated in the UN Climate Conference COP28 in Dubai and the COP29 in Baku to connect with partners and other climate leaders and present on policy innovations in tackling embodied carbon in the built environment and in urban food systems.

Other recent global engagements and opportunities to exert collective influence include:

- Presenting at the Buildings and Climate Global Forum in Paris in session titled: Accelerating the use of Wood & Biobased Materials to Decarbonise Buildings.
- Partnering with the Clinton Global Initiative to disseminate learnings from the Dramatically Reducing Embodied Carbon in Europe project
- Participating in New York City Climate Week sharing experiences, challenges and approaches in co-creating equitable and sustainable urban futures.
- Partnering with the Apolitical platform of over 250,000 public servants globally at all levels of government to launch a community of practice for policymakers working on transformative climate action.
- Presenting CNCA's approach supporting cities in centering equity and justice in city resilience strategies at The Klosters Forum 2024.
- Partnering with Bauhaus Earth and Built by Nature to host a workshop to define and build upon the Principles of Responsible Timber Construction at the Hamburg Sustainability Conference 2024.
- Sharing our expertise with the Club of Rome to explore the role of systems thinking in the built environment.



**CNCA Executive Director  
Simone Mangili presenting at  
COP 29**

# Case Study

## Shifting European Union Policy for a Truly Net-Zero Built Environment

Over the past years, CNCA has played an active and growing part in shaping EU policy for a truly net-zero built environment. In close partnership with Eurocities, CNCA has helped bring the voices of cities into the heart of EU decision-making, joining a strong coalition of European stakeholders—including ECOS, the European Environmental Bureau, and the World Green Building Council—focused on reducing embodied carbon and scaling up the use of bio-based materials. Together, we have driven progress on key policies such as the [Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#) (EPBD) and the [Construction Products Regulation](#) (CPR), advocating for whole-life carbon accounting, the inclusion of bio-based materials, and stronger climate ambition. This work has helped secure important wins: lifecycle Global Warming Potential calculations in the EPBD, stronger environmental provisions in the CPR, and greater recognition of cities' roles in the green transition. CNCA's participation in the [EU Whole-Life Carbon Roadmap working group](#) has further ensured that city-level action and priorities are reflected in long-term EU climate planning.



**2024 In-person workshop in Lille, France for the Dramatically Reducing Embodied Carbon in Europe's Built Environment project. Photo by Fabrice Caterini, Inediz**

## Strategic Goal 6: Cultivate Transformational Leadership

Now, more than ever, sustainability directors and senior staff must be effective change makers and managers. Transformational change requires a unique skill set that is not often cultivated in government officials but necessary if we are to spur transformative action. CNCA supports city leaders' transformational leadership development needs so they can excel in their roles as change-makers. We do this by assessing members' leadership strengths and needs and identifying common structural, technical and political barriers. We offer a curriculum of experiential, transformative development and skills building.

Climate leaders, who are often sustainability directors in their cities, aren't necessarily trained in advocacy, so there can be a learning curve for understanding how to most effectively build ownership around challenging policy interventions.

CNCA's approach to supporting climate action places a strong emphasis on cultivating leadership through peer engagement, support systems, and tailored training.



**Leadership Training during Helsinki Annual Meeting, 2019**



**Former Deputy Director Trude Rauken, at a leadership training in Oslo, 2016**

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We've been taking the lessons learned from the leadership training and the week of programming and have pitched to our City leadership team and in one-on-one's with our Council a refocus of our climate work to hone in on adaptive challenges and to put people and equity first. This is a direct outcome of being invited to the training, and the association with CNCA has built deep trust into our recommendations.

— Chris Read, San Luis Obispo (guest city at the 2019 Annual Meeting in Helsinki)

# Case Study

## CNCA Leadership Workshop – Helsinki Meeting, 2019

CNCA hosted a two-day Leadership Training Workshop as part of the annual meeting in Helsinki in 2019. Leaders from 13 different member cities participated in the event, which was focused on helping leaders become more effective and/or transformational as leaders. The primary objectives included building an awareness and understanding of systems change principles, tools and practices as applied in the context of deep decarbonization; applying systems change principles and practices to city-specific challenges; and the establishment of a learning community around these practices.



**CNCA Director of Climate Justice Tracy Morgenstern at the 2019 Leadership Training in Helsinki**

## Strategic Goal 7: Help Cities Communicate Effectively

Communication is an essential component in building awareness and supporting new policies and advocacy work around climate change. Sound policies won't get implemented in a lasting way unless the general public and decision makers support it. CNCA supports cities in their efforts to communicate effectively with the stakeholders they are trying to influence so they can implement the game changing policies necessary for achieving their ambitious goals.

CNCA does this through:

- Training and skill building for members and other leading cities, with a focus on storytelling and effective presentation skills across mediums, as well as offering new ways of talking about decarbonization, net zero, carbon neutrality, embodied carbon and more.
- Collaboration on research to benchmark climate perspectives and behaviors.
- Peer sharing effective campaign strategies.
- The dissemination of key messaging, including thought leadership and social media posts about the importance of the work and where we are moving the needle.

CNCA also supports member cities by giving visibility to the innovative work they are spearheading. We accomplish this through project-specific profiles in mainstream digital media, convening peer sharing opportunities to disseminate learnings widely on social media and developing resources for cities to draw on to build their capacity to communicate more effectively.

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CNCA helped build the readiness for change through conversation with staff from the Lord Mayor's Office, our CEO, our engagement team, our programs and strategy areas.

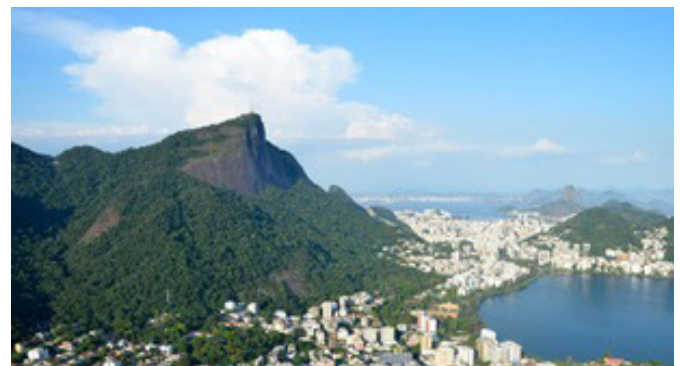
— Chris Derksema, Previous Sustainability Director, City Sustainability, City of Sydney, Australia



**Former CNCA Director of Communications, Michael Shank leading a workshop at 2019 Annual Meeting in Helsinki**



**Founding Director Johanna Partin speaking at the EcoCity World Summit in Melbourne in conjunction with the 2017 CNCA Annual Meeting**



**City of Rio De Janeiro**



# Case Study

## CNCA's Communication Efforts on Embodied Carbon and Bio-Based Materials

CNCA has been at the forefront of advocating for sustainable urban development, recognizing that addressing embodied carbon—the emissions associated with materials and construction processes—is as critical as tackling operational emissions. CNCA has also championed the use of low carbon, reused, recycled and bio-based materials as a key solution for reducing the carbon footprint of buildings and infrastructure. To accelerate the adoption of these concepts, CNCA has employed a diverse communication approach from educational resources like [factsheets](#) and [Q&A](#) guides, to storytelling through [videos](#), capacity-building through targeted training (such as the CNCA x One Click LCA [course](#) for city officers), and regular media [snapshots](#) to capture momentum and progress.



**City of Yokohama**



**Mark Chambers, former Director of NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability at Town Hall Event during 2018 CNCA Annual Meeting in Boulder, CO**

# What's Next: Looking to the Future

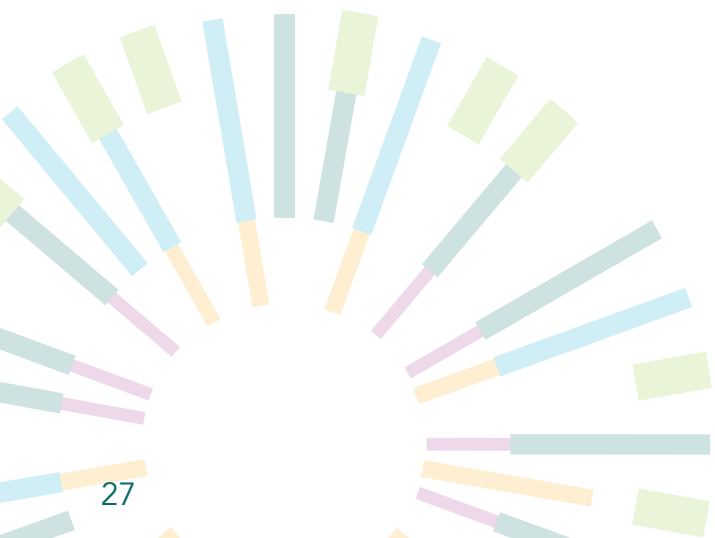
As CNCA looks to its next decade and beyond, political tides have shifted in key geographies, ambitious national commitments have waned or failed to materialize, and climate calamities continue to intensify - making it ever clearer how indispensable local leadership is. In this context, we continue to explore ways to increase the impact and effectiveness of what we do to enable our member cities to do more, and to do it faster.

Organizationally, we aim to consolidate CNCA's position and expand the scope and influence of our global community to inspire city practitioners worldwide, and to reach change-makers and policymakers at all levels. Our incorporation as an independent non-profit in Brussels, Belgium in 2024 will enable CNCA to build stronger partnerships across continents and allow us to participate in global initiatives and collaborations. Our Founding Board and the development of short and medium strategic pathways will support our efforts to raise significant capital to meet our ambitions. This will bolster CNCA's capacity to drive transformative climate action globally, help to navigate external challenges and leverage opportunities, and ensure resilience over the longer term.

In addition to strengthening CNCA's position, we will need to remain nimble and agile organizationally to stay at the leading edge of city climate action. This means listening actively to the challenges our members are tackling and creating the space for members to workshop collectively during virtual and in-person meetings to open new areas for innovation. It will require members to continue to engage deeply with the CNCA community and to spearhead efforts to chart new pathways - be these in multi-level governance and whole-of-society approaches, stakeholder engagement and working with youth, sending market signals, reaching up value chains to address harder to reach emissions, regenerating natural systems or shifting power to communities. And it will mean that the CNCA team needs to stay ready to pivot, create opportunities for risk-taking, and continue to engage with vanguard practitioners and partners worldwide to build leading edge collaborations.

With that top of mind, we have identified the following leading focus areas to continue to explore with our membership through 2025-2027:

- Reimagine the Built Environment
- Transform Urban Food Systems
- Innovate Strategies to Get to Net-Zero and Climate Positive
- Embed Planetary Boundaries Into Climate Governance for Nature-Positive Futures



Just as CNCA has promoted the use of equity evaluation tools to assist cities in daylighting and addressing inequity in policy and program design, CNCA is working to apply an evaluation tool for CNCA that uses benchmarks across a spectrum from extractive to reparative. The results of the assessment are informing our efforts to better center equity in our operations and programming, including the climate justice grant program. Based on the recommendations, CNCA created a document to support conversations with priority community speakers sharing in webinars and events to better boost their comfort and control, and has partnered with an equity consultant to improve the climate justice grant program RFP and decision making process. CNCA staff participated in an in-person ethical storytelling training and we'll continue to plan staff trainings in the future. CNCA will also continue to evaluate how to evolve our programming to better support cities in advancing equity and justice through transformative climate action.

Through the commitment and dedication of our member cities, our collaborating partners and our philanthropic partners, we have achieved much in the past decade but we know this journey has just begun and that climate action must accelerate rapidly. We also know that achieving our climate goals is possible but will require technological advancements, policy and governance changes, radical collaboration and behavioral shifts across our cities and our nations. Most importantly, we know that climate action needs to be a force for positive change in people's lives, that we need to prioritize benefits to those communities most impacted by climate change and often excluded from decision-making processes. We are working to write the playbook to achieve these goals and we invite you to join us and learn more by going to [www.carbonneutralcities.org](http://www.carbonneutralcities.org).



**2017 Annual Meeting in Melbourne, Australia**



**Stockholm City Hall, 2024**

# Case Study

## Reimagining Europe's Built Environment for a Truly Just Transition

CNCA recently unveiled a new phase of its innovative programming to support cities charting new pathways in decarbonizing the built environment: European Cities Pioneering Low-Carbon Buildings for a Just Transition. Supported by the Laudes Foundation, this initiative empowers 15 leading European cities (Bordeaux Métropole, Glasgow, Helsinki, Lille Métropole, London Authority, Lund, Madrid, Greater Manchester Authority, Borough of Newham, Oslo, Stockholm, Tampere, Turku and Valladolid) to significantly reduce embodied emissions in the built environment, increase the adoption of bio-based materials in construction projects and prioritize community needs for a just transition.

Through 2027, with support from CNCA and partners like Built by Nature and the World Green Building Council, 15 European cities will lead the way in promoting a renovation-first approach that extends the lifespan of buildings; advancing circularity in construction through better connections between supply and demand; facilitating a paradigm shift in material selection toward low-carbon, bio-based alternatives; and placing justice and equity at the forefront of efforts to decarbonize the build environment.



**CNCA Built Environment Lead Irene Garcia in Lille, France**



**CNCA's 2025 Annual Meeting will be held in Glasgow**

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The Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance is a hugely important ally in the fight against climate change. The need to build on the broad consensus on the necessity of global climate action and to be honest about what's actually required to decarbonise has rarely been greater. Cities are at the forefront of the delivery of those practical actions that make a tangible difference to communities and citizens. Networks like CNCA are vital in nurturing that solidarity amongst peer cities and aligning our actions and ambitions. We are very proud to be members and to host the CNCA in Glasgow and look forward to the next 10 years.

— Susan Aitken, Council Leader of the Glasgow City Council

# Case Study

## Designing Urban Climate Governance for Regenerative Futures

Many cities worldwide now have put climate action plans in place, and the most ambitious are charging towards net-zero at an accelerating rate. However, most have not yet adopted a systems-based approach that puts nature and people together at the center of their climate action. Driven by political mandates to reach net-zero as quickly as possible, cities risk prioritizing approaches and solutions that substitute systems based on extractive economies powered by fossil fuels with similarly extractive economies that continue to jeopardize natural systems globally. This is not the only way forward, however. By shifting paradigms, cities can situate climate action in a broader framework of planetary boundaries, prioritizing approaches that advance climate ambitions by regenerating natural systems and securing intergenerational livelihoods. This requires a fundamental reimagining of how cities behave, how decision-making is structured, the ways in which cities and communities are to thrive. With support from the VKR Foundation, CNCA aims to accelerate this paradigm shift by supporting cities in exploring how to define and operationalize a systems-based approach to transformative climate action based on the full integrity and respect for natural systems.



**The CMS building in Stuttgart, Germany boasts around 11,000 plants on the green façade and 40 trees on the terraces.**



## About Us

The Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance mobilizes transformative climate action in cities to achieve prosperity, social equity, resilience and better quality of life for all on a thriving planet. CNCA supports global leading cities in their goal to become carbon neutral as rapidly as possible by fostering collaboration, innovative approaches, and sharing lessons with other cities ready to pursue similar goals. CNCA member cities are globally influential, have demonstrated deep carbon reductions, and are vocal leaders and risk takers. What sets CNCA apart from other city networks is that it is the only member-driven, practitioner-led organization created by cities for cities. CNCA's core city representatives are the Sustainability and/or Climate Directors and leads in their cities. Cities seek the CNCA community because of the unique value created in pooling deep knowledge and expertise to drive transformative climate action. CNCA members advance and troubleshoot policy development collectively, share learnings and forge support networks, innovate together and build new capacity to take on emerging challenges. To learn more, visit us at [carbonneutralcities.org](https://carbonneutralcities.org).



## Steering Committee

The CNCA Steering Committee, composed of core representatives from up to 7 member cities, meets monthly with CNCA's leadership to refine and guide the implementation of CNCA's strategic work plan, assess progress and identify areas for improvement and pivoting. The CNCA Steering Committee also keeps in regular contact with the broader membership to gather feedback and input into strategic development and implementation processes, and to gauge changing needs and priorities.

## Board of Directors

We are proud to feature our founding Board of Directors as of September 2024, intentionally recruited for their deep and diverse knowledge, lived-experience and relationships that will allow CNCA to grow and thrive in the coming years, fulfilling and adapting its mission to meet the needs of members amid changing imperatives in an evolving landscape of climate action. CNCA's Board members provide insight that will help further CNCA's outreach and impact, working individually and collectively to usher in new partnerships and enhance growth opportunities for the organization across geographies and sectors. The CNCA Board supports the vision and strategic direction for the Alliance set by CNCA's Steering Committee.