

Summary of Indigenous & Frontline Communities' Vision:

# DEFINING AN EQUITABLE & JUST TRANSITION TO BUILDING DECARBONIZATION



COMMUNITIES  
FOR A BETTER  
ENVIRONMENT  
established 1978



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Engagement & Summary by

**PUEBLO**

## BACKGROUND & PROCESS

On behalf of the Leap LA Coalition and Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles, Pueblo Planning facilitated a series of education and listening sessions about building decarbonization with Indigenous peoples (Tongva Gabrielino, Fernandeno Tataviam, and Chumash) and Frontline Communities throughout the City of Los Angeles. Through this ethnographic effort, the project team was able to better understand the lived experience, concerns, priorities, and recommended building decarbonization strategies of Indigenous peoples and Frontline Communities in Los Angeles.

The Pueblo Planning team first met with Leap LA committee members to learn about the local policy conversations regarding building decarbonization and get a better understanding of Indigenous and Frontline communities' lived experiences with energy and housing and their familiarity with the building decarbonization conversation. From there, the Pueblo Planning team worked with the Leap LA coalition to co-develop popular education materials to share with community members during the engagement sessions.

Pueblo Planning partnered with community-based organizations to facilitate a total of **thirteen workshops** (virtual, in-person, and hybrid options) which engaged Indigenous and Frontline communities throughout the City. Community members that hold relationships with Communities for a Better Environment in Wilmington, Esperanza Community Housing in South Los Angeles, Pacoima Beautiful in Pacoima, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) in South Los Angeles, Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) in East and Central Los Angeles, and Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples (City-wide) participated in education and listening sessions regarding building decarbonization.



Participants engaged in a series of three community workshops. The first community workshop was a grounding and education session where community members became familiar with the concept of building decarbonization and the City's process for developing a building decarbonization policy. The second community workshop was a listening session where the community had an opportunity to share their experiences with housing and energy, their concerns with the potential City policy and programs, and identify strategies to address these concerns specifically. The third community workshop was a feedback session in which the Pueblo Planning team shared the community-identified concerns and priorities with the participants to ensure the project team accurately documented the experiences and building decarbonization priorities they heard.

***The following summarizes the Indigenous and Frontline community's vision and how they define an equitable and just transition to building decarbonization.***



# SUMMARY OF INDIGENOUS AND FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES' VISION

Indigenous Peoples and Frontline communities experience the consequences of climate change first and worst. Despite these injustices, Indigenous Peoples, including Tongva Gabrielino, Fernandeno Tataviam, and Chumash, and Frontline communities in the region are resilient and demand that they be included in shaping and centered in all policy, budgeting, and program decisions regarding climate justice. Frontline communities are often low-income communities and communities of color living in neighborhoods that lack the basic infrastructure needed to support them, and who will be incredibly impacted as a result of increased flooding, fires, heatwaves, and energy prices. Furthermore, Frontline communities often live adjacent to the oil industry, oil drilling, and extremely toxic infrastructure. Additionally, Frontline communities also include laborers whose daily work or living environments are polluted or toxic and those whose jobs are impacted by climate change and/or the transition to clean energy.

As there is a shift to cleaner energy sources, an increase in clean energy appliances, and energy efficiency in homes and commercial buildings, it is crucial to make sure that Frontline communities are not loaded with additional land use, economic, and health impacts. If the technology, programs, and opportunities are not accessible to Frontline communities, the benefits are not either.

## ***Building Decarbonization policies typically include:***

- ***Electrification:*** Replaces polluting natural gas appliances with all-electric appliances, such as an electric stove instead of a gas stove;
- ***Energy Efficiency:*** Reduces energy use by making home/building changes that use less energy (e.g. replacing windows, insulation, upgrading lighting); and
- ***Cleaner Energy Sources:*** Moves to pollution-free and carbon-free energy sources such as wind and solar.



Frontline communities shared that they are already reducing energy consumption in their homes to keep energy costs low. They are deploying strategies such as being outside at public parks/pools or in public spaces like libraries and shopping centers to cool off. Additionally, many keep plants inside and outside their home, wake up early to cook family meals for the day, or close curtains during peak sun times to mitigate the heat. It is important that the City acknowledge these efforts as important contributions to building decarbonization, and further actions in building decarbonization should not only protect but prioritize Frontline communities as beneficiaries of this transition.

Community members made it clear that these typical elements (electrification, energy efficiency, and cleaner energy sources) alone do not ensure a just and equitable transition to building decarbonization. Additional measures are needed to ensure a just transition. A Just Transition is recognizing past harm, actively stopping the bad, building the good our communities need by moving the money to prioritize community-led solutions, having community members lead deep democracy, and changing the rules regarding energy efficiency to incorporate holistic solutions.

To incorporate equity into building decarbonization policy, community members reminded us that it is essential to provide a holistic and people-centered approach. Community members do not live siloed lives; hence policy decisions are experienced in a complex manner that has implications beyond their intentions. Community members understand these connections and complexities and shared their concerns with the City’s development of building decarbonization policies, and offered their own recommended strategies to ensure that Indigenous and Frontline communities are not harmed by this transition but are prioritized in receiving the benefits of such a transition. Twelve key themes that emerged in conversations with the community:

1. Environmental justice;
2. Equity;
3. Land;
4. Plant and animal life;
5. Materials, engineering, and architecture;
6. Housing;
7. Jobs;
8. Health and safety;
9. Energy;
10. Cost;
11. Consumer protections; and
12. Engagement and empowerment.



# 1. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

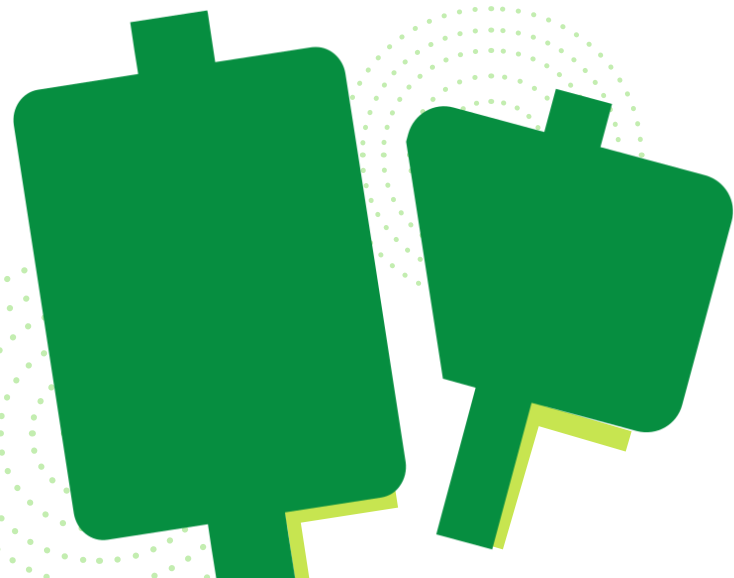
## Community-identified Concern

Historically, the **Tongva Gabrielino, Fernandeno Tataviam, and Chumash**, were enslaved and forcibly displaced from their land by the Spanish, Mexican, and then United States governments to exploit their relatives (defined as all living beings, including plants, water, minerals, etc.) and extract fossil fuels from the land. Displacement of Indigenous Peoples and exploitation of their relatives is still happening, given our current extractive economy and fossil fuel-based energy systems.

Many Frontline community members shared frustration regarding the health risks and dangers of living in close proximity to oil extraction, refining, and transport. There were shared sentiments of feeling trapped and, at times, hopeless against the giant oil industry. However, there was also a common vision across communities which included setting oil drilling setbacks, phasing out oil drilling, expanding access to renewable energy, and supporting a local economy that does not harm the community's health and environment. A just transition includes recognizing the enslavement, displacement, and egregious treatment of Indigenous and Black, and African American communities as a way to change the story and ensure that the status quo is challenged. We can not take back the errors of environmental racism, but we have a responsibility to address them and create real solutions.

## Community-identified Strategies

- A. *Correct injustices that have been created by existing policies and ensure that future injustices are not created;*
- B. *Identify the connections and consider the intersecting demands of local and global land back, public health, environment, housing, and labor movements;*
- C. *Work in solidarity with global movements of Indigenous, black, and people of color fighting the impacts of extractive industries;*
- D. *Do not transition from one extractive industry to another;*
- E. *Phase out oil drilling and create a plan to transition away from fossil fuels; and*
- F. *Apply the seven generations principle, an Iroquois philosophy that dictates that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future.*



## 2. EQUITY



### Community-Identified Concern

Indigenous and Frontline communities could be most impacted by the decarbonization transition if there is an unequal distribution of the benefits and burdens, and if the benefits aren't accessible to all from the start. Additionally, costs, environmental impacts, health, and land use disparities could increase.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Ensure that economic benefits from decarbonization technologies are passed down to low-income tenants (i.e., energy bill savings from solar, energy efficiency retrofits);*
- B. *Incentives are in place specifically for low-income people to be able to access the technologies right from the start at no upfront cost; and*
- C. *Acknowledge past harms and trauma, and prioritize establishing or mending current relationships and avoiding continued harm.*

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## 3. LAND



### Community-Identified Concern

Building decarbonization policies and programs typically do not consider the land on which the buildings occupy. This disconnection has led to harm to the environment and people, and has limited the opportunities for building decarbonization to bring about both repair and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Implement Indigenous land management practices for cooling and temperature regulation around native landscapes, thus providing natural ways to increase energy efficiency in buildings;*
- B. *Ensure the City has a maintenance plan that it implements to care for native landscapes and trees;*
- C. *Continue or reinstate tax credits for zero-scaping funding for homeowners that specifically address heat reduction measures;*
- D. *Restore the soil to a healthy state to capture carbon; and*
- E. *Give the land back to the **Tongva Gabrielino, Fernandeno Tataviam, and Chumash**, as well as support and partner with them for land stewardship efforts.*



## 4. PLANT & ANIMAL LIFE



### Community-Identified Concern

No energy source is perfect, and even renewable technologies like wind and solar have land use and environmental impacts that must be considered. Large wind and solar farms and supporting transmission lines can harm animals and plant life through the removal and destruction of important habitats or when animals come in close contact with these technologies.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Protect plant and animal life by ensuring that habitats are not disturbed, and that people are able to have a reciprocal relationship to place;*
- B. *Increase access to solar panels on existing buildings and infrastructure as a way to limit expansion and protect habitats; and*
- C. *Find ways to reduce overall and peak energy demands will allow for greater system efficiency so that we will need fewer energy projects and fewer environmental disturbances overall.*

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## 5. MATERIALS, ENGINEERING, & ARCHITECTURE



### Community-Identified Concern

Building Decarbonization is typically done by electrification, energy efficiency, and using cleaner energy sources. However, these methods rely on more extraction and ignore Indigenous practices and knowledge. There are more regenerative practices that can be incorporated into building decarbonization.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Integrate traditional ecological knowledge to inform engineering, architecture, and materials used for housing and commercial buildings to be more energy-efficient and less carbon-intensive by using materials that do not require as much energy to process or transport (i.e., California Earth Domes);*
- B. *Require new housing to be developed in ways that utilize the natural landscape to reduce energy use to reduce heat from coming into the home; and*
- C. *Ensure materials for the home (solar panels, appliances, weatherization materials, etc.) do not contain toxins and that materials have a circular design requirement, in which the makers of these materials are required to take back materials that are at the end of their life to recycle or repurpose.*

## 6. HOUSING



### Community-Identified Concern

Without protections, building decarbonization could create a financial incentive for property owners to renovate/modify their property(ies) which could make it harder for tenants to remain in place. Renters could be at risk of displacement if property owners harass, illegally evict, or push retrofit costs onto long-standing tenants to recoup costs and charge higher rents to new tenants. Additionally, failing to protect smaller property owners from increased costs could exacerbate the corporate consolidation of the real estate market.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Include strong anti-displacement language in all electrification policies that affect low-income renters and owners, as well as address temporary displacement during retrofits;*
- B. *Protect tenants so they can stay in their homes, through strong rent control, just-cause eviction laws, and ample relocation funds, along with strong local government enforcement; and*
- C. *Increase homeownership programs and opportunities for Indigenous and Frontline communities.*

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## 7. JOBS



### Community-Identified Concern

Transitioning to building decarbonization can result in gas union job losses; however, there are potential job opportunities in the clean energy industry. Additionally, Indigenous and Frontline communities want access to job training and opportunities in this newly emerging sector.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Prioritize making economic opportunities work for Indigenous and Frontline communities;*
- B. *Make provisions for undocumented individuals to get access to training and jobs;*
- C. *Ensure unionization, living wages, and strong benefits for workers;*
- D. *Provide support for just transition measures such as pension/retirement security, job retraining, and job placement for younger workers;*
- E. *Provide protection as well as hiring and training programs for workers who have been displaced and are entering a new industry and individuals with employment barriers; and*
- F. *Encourage energy efficiency but not at the expense of workers; protect employees (such as domestic workers) by ensuring that there are comfortable and safe levels of temperature control when they are working.*

## 8. HEALTH & SAFETY



### Community-Identified Concern

Transitioning buildings from gas to all-electric will increase electricity demand and possibly challenge grid resiliency, resulting in potential blackouts. This could create an issue for those who depend on electricity for health purposes, such as refrigeration for medication. The transition and changes could also affect people's mental health due to added stressors (i.e. adapting to new appliances, electrical bill increases, concerns about temporary or permanent displacement, etc.).

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. Increase air quality monitoring in Frontline communities;
- B. Improve indoor air quality through electrification;
- C. Provide masks for severe air quality conditions;
- D. Phase out oil drilling and create a plan to transition away from fossil fuels; and
- E. Share resources and conduct outreach on adaptation strategies to improve health.

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## 9. ENERGY



### Community-Identified Concern

Transitioning from gas to all-electric buildings will increase electricity demand and possibly challenge grid resiliency. Without more solar or renewable energy, the system could be shocked and overwhelmed, causing more blackouts. The immediate effects on electric rates are unclear, but rates should go down over time.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. Develop resilience hubs where people can go if there's a power outage to charge medical devices and other devices, store food, and keep cool (making sure resilience hubs have some capacity for cooling and air quality control during climate crisis events as well);
- B. Integrate solar plus storage to support residential buildings in transitioning from natural gas to electric while maintaining dependable electrical connections;
- C. Support locally generated and distributed renewable energy sources/systems (i.e., solar on apartment buildings, public buildings, houses, etc.); and
- D. Provide incentives to owners to make changes to their home(s)/ building(s), such as solar panels, which are costly and out of reach for the community.

## 10. COST



### Community-Identified Concern

Appliance and retrofit can be costly (on average from \$14,000 to \$28,000 per rental unit) for new all-electric appliances, labor, gas disconnection, electrical panel upgrades, and energy efficiency upgrades, which could leave behind affordable housing, low-income homeowners, and tenants.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Develop subsidy programs for low-income tenants, low-income homeowners, and small-scale property owners to support the electrification of homes; ensure that programs do not have many requirements to qualify;*
- B. *Ensure energy rates are structured in a manner that does not disproportionately harm Indigenous and Frontline communities;*
- C. *Ensure energy cost-saving benefits from solar and energy efficient appliances are passed down to renters;*
- D. *Ensure subsidies are not provided for luxury developments and must increase the requirement to include a higher percentage of new developments to be designated for low-income housing;*
- E. *Ensure tenant protections so that property owners do not evict tenants to complete the retrofits, and if tenants need to move from the property to make improvements, there are provisions to ensure accommodations; and*
- F. *Create new rates and incentive programs to ensure no cost to low-income ratepayers.*

## 11. CONSUMER PROTECTIONS



### Community-Identified Concern

The transition to building decarbonization will require a large investment from homeowners, renters, and property owners. It is important that the City do all it can to protect consumers from scams, poor quality work or materials, and toxic materials.

### Community-Identified Strategies

- A. *Develop a list of trusted companies that community members can use or hire to make modifications to their home;*
- B. *Ensure materials used are certified to ensure their quality and that they are doing what they are intended to do; and*
- C. *Implement a City inspection program that reviews retrofits (solar, weatherization, and appliances) after installation and the building decarbonization retrofits (from solar to appliances to weatherization) every five years to ensure the quality of work and materials, and that these retrofits are operating as they should to reduce carbon emissions.*

# 12. ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT

## Community-identified Concern

Democratization requires that everyone can meaningfully shape policies, programs, and budgets. When policies are made without meaningful input by Indigenous and Frontline communities, these policies will inevitably harm them. Many Frontline communities feel abandoned by the City as they have experienced deferred maintenance of their neighborhoods, from trash pick-up to broken sidewalks. Much effort, trust building, and regularly scheduled accountability check-ins will need to be put into the transition to building decarbonization to repair these relationships and ensure the abandonment of Frontline communities does not continue with the new set of policies and actions.

## Community-identified Strategies

- A. *Create an inclusive and representative process that includes the input from Indigenous peoples in the region and frontline communities that can either stand to benefit most or be most harmed from this transition;*
- B. *Provide ongoing education around Building Decarbonization, ensure the transition is centered around and co-developed with Indigenous and Frontline communities;*
- C. *Provide training, information, and a community hotline for residents to understand retrofitting and installation, and outreach to tenants, so they understand the process and their rights as tenants;*
- D. *Create a community advisory committee, made up of multigenerational (including youth) tenants and low-income homeowners (who are resourced to participate) with decision-making authority to guide policy development and receive reports quarterly regarding updates during implementation so that they can provide guidance on modifications;*
- E. *Resource and facilitate community conversations where community members can exchange strategies on what they are doing now to conserve energy and mitigate heat and where they can get resources;*
- F. *Institute an environmental education program, specifically regarding building decarbonization in public school curriculum;*
- G. *Develop an ongoing relationship and communication line where the community, advocates, and experts can discuss, share information, and answer questions about what is going on in the community around building electrification pilots and policies; and*
- H. *Support and increase the capacity of Indigenous and Frontline communities to allow for more meaningful collaboration and co-development of building decarbonization policies.*



## The Value of Centering Indigenous and Frontline Communities

Community knowledge and expertise is a critically-undervalued resource. Through this process, we learned not only what community members wanted in decarbonization policies, but also their questions and how they understood building decarbonization within the context of their day-to-day lives. This understanding is much richer and more nuanced than the high-level policies that are being debated by lawmakers, and this difference in understanding, if not improved, will likely provide challenges to the implementation of building decarbonization efforts.

Community engagement helps not only get valuable community input about a proposed policy or program, but also as a way to share information about existing programs and policies that community members might not know about or have access to. There were several moments during the community workshops where community members were able to point each other in the right direction for more information about policies and programs that they had been wondering about. This demonstrates that there is both a hunger for action and a disconnect between the programs that exist and the people who want to access them.

Two-way communication, directly between community members and City officials, helps policymakers make better-informed decisions going forward and helps communities better understand how existing and proposed policies can and will impact their lives. To design more effective policies, government officials should prioritize and fund direct community engagement and work toward more collaborative policy co-design that centers on community expertise.

