Jump to step: Preview

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Beyond education and engagement: How the Oak Bay Coolkit Program empowers Climate Champions in greening private and public land (3515)

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Most communities have yet to become climate-prepared, resilient neighbourhoods or meet GHG and canopy targets. This presentation describes a novel process for implementing local nature-based climate solutions, using powerful 'cool tools' to motivate collective neighbourhood action (Sheppard 2018; Westerhoff 2018). The Oak Bay Coolkit program empowers residents to become local climate champions in the District of Oak Bay, British Columbia, Canada. As in other cities, much of Oak Bay's green infrastructure occurs on private land that is difficult for municipalities to influence and regulate.

The Oak Bay Coolkit program is a 3-year partnership between local government (Oak Bay Parks department) and the Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) at the University of British Columbia. The program seeks to activate micro-neighbourhoods where residents care the most, can take practical collective action, and work in alignment with local policies and staff (Barron 2019). The Coolkit itself is an attractive, accessible document customised to Oak Bay, available online as a DIY resource for all residents. It provides fun 'hands-on' activities and low-barrier visual learning tools to build capacity and guide local climate action, through a five-step process:

1. Chatting - neighbourhood conversations and climate walk
2. Mapping – vulnerability/asset mapping using Google Maps

3. Ranking – household/block sustainability rating
4. Visioning - visualizing climate solutions on Google Streetview.
5. Acting - developing practical local climate action plans

Residents and community groups in 2022 were invited to receive training on local climate action through a series of three community workshops, supported by District Council, staff and local experts, with about 50 participants attending.

The workshops resulted in a network of trained Coolkit Champions, who self-organized into 8 local groups (6 neighborhoods and 2 multi-family dwellings) plus individual champions, collectively covering almost 12% of Oak Bay's residential blocks. The Coolkit program has been enthusiastically embraced by participants and community/volunteer organizations, with significant media attention. Resulting climate action plans address diverse adaptation and mitigation solutions, most of which align with District policies (eg. increasing canopy cover from 33 to 40%). Proposed actions include physical and behavioural solutions such as tree planting, raingardens, meadowscaping, traffic calming, cool roofs, and reducing air travel. Year 1 champions were awarded certificates and free trees from the District: most groups planned for tree planting on public and private land, in collaboration with District Parks staff, and over 40 adaptive trees have been planted to date.

Most groups recruited additional neighbours through social gatherings and linking to existing organisations, such as "ice-cream social" events, a Block Watch meeting, strata council meetings, walkability audit, and block parties. Ongoing activities are sustained through a Facebook group and monthly meetings, and have supported increased city-wide tree-planting rates, a Council ban on fossil fuel gardening equipment, and plans for de-paving and restoration of a creekside parking area vulnerable to heatwaves.

Recruitment of more Coolkit Champions from other Oak Bay neighbourhoods and schools is underway in Year 2. The overall program is scalable through emulation by other municipalities and through train-the-trainer programs such as UBC'S Micro-certificate in Climate Action and Community Engagement.

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