

Climate Change Absent on Campaign Trail

We've all seen the images: the disappearance of the Loire River in France, out-of-control fires in Spain and flash floods in Texas arriving hot on the heels of a crippling drought. But while the climate crisis seems to have settled in elsewhere this year, Winnipeggers shouldn't feel too smug about it.

Yes, we've had a relatively temperate summer, but it's probably not a signal of more to come. In fact, blistering hot, bone-dry summer days are expected to more than quadruple in coming years. Not to mention predictions of wetter Springs and the threat of flooding.

Which is why I'm just a wee bit puzzled as to why a vast majority of our mayoral and city council candidates are making little or no mention of how the city plans to combat climate change, or the fact that Winnipeg has been glacially slow in implementing a comprehensive climate resiliency plan.

And from where I stand, that is not good news.

So, why aren't our candidates talking about climate change, or even touting the city's newly published Community Energy Investment Roadmap – and how it should be rapidly implemented? A roadmap, targeting carbon emission reductions in five major sectors - the big two being transportation and natural gas heating.

I'll bet most Winnipeggers haven't even heard about it. I know I hadn't, until I started researching this article.

Granted, some mayoral candidates do have climate change recommendations in their platforms but instead of leading with that, most seem content to pander to the bottom-line in their public statements.

So, why is that? Have our leaders simply decided that climate change is too scary and anxiety-provoking a subject to address head on? Don't they get that by inspiring Winnipeggers with a concrete plan for shaping a city that's better equipped to reduce emissions and deal with extreme weather events, they might actually allay some of the climate angst being experienced by so many in the general public? Not to mention engaging the young and more disillusioned voters among us, with a message of action and hope?

I don't know, maybe it's just easier to address business as usual issues like public safety, road improvements and balancing the budget. It would certainly seem so, given the amount of coverage those particular topics have received thus far.

Now, before you jump down my throat, I know that some of these issues are of real concern to many you. Truth be told, I also get upset about the number of bike thefts and axel-breaking potholes in my neighbourhood. But here's the thing – what good are an army of cops or

smoother roads or balanced budgets when the world is in the midst of a climate crisis? Will a balanced budget protect your home from flooding or your elderly mother from the impact of extreme heat in her un-airconditioned apartment?

No, it won't. And that's why it frustrates me beyond measure that so many politicians seem to view climate change as a scary monster that needs to be locked in the campaign closet, rather than seeing it as an exciting opportunity to inspire voters with a vision of real change.

Just imagine it - a politician with the courage to hit the streets and stage to talk about how they plan to revolutionize our local economy with green energy and green jobs. A politician who reassures us with a concrete plan for a biodiverse, retrofitted "all electric" city that is well prepared to weather any extreme climate change throws at us. A leader who has a realistic step-by-step plan to make Winnipeg one of the most climate resilient cities in Canada.

Other urban leaders have done it, so why not ours? Just look at cities and towns like Selkirk, MB and Montreal. Both have already deployed net zero emission strategies, as well as climate resiliency plans that guide every infrastructure project they undertake. And they're inspiring every sector of society, from homeowners to business leaders, to participate along with them.

And on the day I find myself writing this, a day when scientists have just announced that sea-level rise from a rapidly melting Greenland ice cap is now inevitable and are calling on their colleagues to take nonviolent direct action to force governments to respond, it seems even more urgent. Which means that it's long past time Winnipeg voters stand up and take action, in the streets and at upcoming political town halls, to demand that our civic leaders take climate change out of the closet and address it head-on.