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**Public Participation and
Climate Governance
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**Public Participation, Deliberative Democracy, and
Climate Governance: Learning from the Citizens'
Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges**

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1 Introduction¹

Citizen deliberation processes have a strong track record when it comes to polarized political issues. When designed well, they can move participants from received sound bites to informed conversation; from caricatures of opposing views to mutual respect; and in many cases from mistrust and discord to shared paths forward (e.g. Dryzek 2010, Gastil and Levine 2005, Lukensmeyer 2013). There are, however, persistent questions about the *impact* of deliberative democratic processes on policy making and governance. There are relatively few processes to evaluate in specific connection with climate change.

We were centrally involved in the design and delivery of the Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges.² This process was convened by Edmonton's municipal government to generate recommendations on climate and energy transition strategy and policy, in partnership with Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD)³ and the Centre for Public Involvement (CPI).⁴ Fifty-six randomly chosen Panelists selected for demographic and attitudinal diversity met for six days to understand choices facing the City and offer informed advice. In the end, the Panel found common ground in urging (by a majority of 92%) that the municipality adopt policies that would make Edmonton a low carbon city by 2050 (City of Edmonton 2013).

The Citizens' Panel was an impressive demonstration of citizen capacity and wisdom. But processes like this typically happen at the margins of democratic decision making—they tend to be interesting and encouraging novelties rather than governance mechanisms with real traction.⁵ While it is at this point difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of the Panel, there is reason to believe that City administration will deliver an Energy Transition Strategy to Council in 2014 that does justice to Panel recommendations. At the same time, we are acutely aware of administrative binds, entrenched interests, and political calculations that will make it hard for the Panel's recommendations—which are ambitious and in some cases costly—to shape policy outcomes.

Drawing lessons from our experience with the Citizens' Panel, we suggest that deliberative processes on climate are likely to fall short of aspirations to influence policy unless they are artfully linked to civil society, explicitly tied to formal governance mechanisms, and prominent in the eyes of broader communities.

¹ Thank you to the other members of the Edmonton Citizens' Panel Deliberation Team (Jacquie Dale, Fiona Cavanagh), our partners at the City of Edmonton and the Centre for Public Involvement, the larger Alberta Climate Dialogue team, and our funders at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and at the University of Alberta.

² Referred to in this paper as 'Citizens' Panel' or 'Edmonton Citizens' Panel'.

³ See: www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca.

⁴ See: www.centreforpublicinvolvement.com.

⁵ For an extended discussion of exemplary Canadian examples of deliberative democracy and their ambivalent influence on policy, see Johnson, forthcoming.

In what follows, we situate the Edmonton Citizens' Panel in terms of deliberative democracy in general and citizen deliberation on climate policy in particular, including in the contexts of Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada. We next describe the development of the Citizens' Panel as a collaboration between researchers, deliberation practitioners, and municipal government; processes used in the Panel; and how citizens who diverged on climate change nonetheless identified areas of strong convergence on energy and climate policy. We then turn to three areas we see as key to the impact of exercises like the Edmonton Citizens' Panel on policy making processes and governance around climate change: (1) linkages between deliberation in an invited mini-public and mobilization in civil society; (2) formal articulation between citizen involvement and political decision making; and (3) ensuring strong transparency and public visibility for citizen deliberation processes. We conclude with lessons from the Edmonton Citizens' Panel for climate politics and governance in other contexts.⁶

2 Situating the Edmonton Citizens' Panel

2.1. The Citizens' Panel and Deliberative Democracy

The Edmonton Citizens' Panel was an exercise in 'deliberative democracy'. Deliberative democracy suggests that healthy democracy requires not only strong representative institutions but also robust mechanisms of direct citizen participation in governance and political action. Participatory institutions need to be inclusive of those affected by a decision; support careful dialogue across multiple perspectives and information sources; connect issues to participant values; and have genuine influence on government decision and joint action. (Bohman 1996, Dryzek 2010, Fung 2003, Habermas 1996, Nabatchi et. al. 2012, Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012).

'Deliberative democracy' names both a political theory and an extensive domain of practice encompassing organized grassroots dialogue and action,⁷ sustained dialogue on polarized political questions,⁸ large scale deliberative gatherings to influence state policy,⁹ and smaller deliberative processes to advise governments ('mini-publics').¹⁰ The Edmonton Citizens' Panel fits within this last category: an invited space was opened by the City of Edmonton and partners to provide advice on a particular policy decision. Mini-publics have gained attention in empirical and theoretical political

⁶ A note on methodology: Alberta Climate Dialogue built a strong research apparatus around the Edmonton Citizens' Panel, including a sequence of participant surveys, observational research, and key stakeholder interviews. The material in this paper draws on these sources, but mainly on our experiences as participants in the process of developing and delivering the Panel.

⁷ See, e.g., the work of Everyday Democracy: <http://www.everyday-democracy.org/>.

⁸ See, e.g., the Public Conversations Project: <http://www.publicconversations.org/>.

⁹ See, e.g., *AmericanSpeaks*: <http://participedia.net/en/organizations/americaspeaks>.

¹⁰ The most prominent examples in Canada were the BC Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform (2004), <http://participedia.net/en/cases/british-columbia-citizens-assembly-electoral-reform> and the Ontario Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform (2006-2007), <http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/>.

science, and in ‘mid-level’ theory (Fung 2003) arising from collaboration between deliberative democracy researchers and practitioners.¹¹

Deliberative democrats argue that well designed mini-publics can bring real gains for democratic policy making by:

- Providing decision makers with a sense of where citizens stand on a tough issue once they consider balanced information, hear from multiple perspectives, reflect on values, weigh trade-offs, and make choices.
- Showing politicians, civil servants and fellow citizens new paths forward, especially on issues that are highly polarized or where there is widespread misunderstanding or misinformation.
- Conferring legitimacy on government decisions, and putting a wind at the back of politicians who want to lead change in ways that fit with citizen recommendations.
- Building civic capacities, trust, and also willingness by civil society organizations to act in concert with government on issues of common concern.

These gains are possible when deliberative exercises are designed to have diverse participants, balanced and credible materials providing a range of perspectives, time for deliberation, strong design and facilitation, integration of individual and collective values and principles, and work toward clear collective recommendations.

Alberta Climate Dialogue, a university-community research alliance to which both authors belong, originated at a 2007 meeting of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium Researcher and Practitioner Group. At the edges of that meeting, participants from the US, Canada, and Australia recognized a shared concern with climate change and a desire to see how deliberative democratic methods could contribute to better climate policy making. They decided to learn by doing: to convene citizens in [Alberta and research these processes. With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada](#) as well as university and civil society partners, ABCD has held three deliberations: the Citizens’ Panel on Edmonton’s Energy and Climate Challenges (2012), a province-wide virtual deliberation on energy efficiency funding and regulation (2013), and a citizens’ panel on water and climate change in the Oldman Watershed (2014).¹² ABCD was built around a theory of change that saw government as key in climate responses, partnering with governments on citizen deliberation projects as the best way to influence policy and action. After concerted efforts to create partnerships at the provincial level (where climate issues are highly politicized and perceived as a ‘third rail’ by civil servants), we decided that our best shot at co-convening was at the municipal level. The Edmonton Citizens’ Panel was the most prominent result of this line of work.¹³

¹¹ Key researcher-practitioner networks include: <http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/>, www.ncdd.org, and <http://www.c2d2.ca/>.

¹² Details of all three deliberations are available at: www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca.

¹³ We also were involved in creating the *Greenhouse Gas Action Toolkit for Alberta Communities* (Intelligent Futures 2011).

2. 2. Deliberative Democracy and Climate Change

Climate change regularly gets characterized as a ‘wicked problem’:

- Different stakeholders define the problem differently, and understandings of the problem shift and evolve.
- Climate change involves interdependencies, multiple causes, and uncertainties about localized impacts.
- It has no right solution but only better or worse ones.
- It traverses governance boundaries.
- It does not admit of learning through trial and error.
- It can be considered a symptom of other problems.¹⁴

More recently, climate change has been analyzed as a ‘super-wicked problem’: time is running out; those seeking to solve the problem are also causing it; the central authority needed to address the problem is weak or non-existent; and policy making bodies irrationally discount the future costs of current behaviors (Levin et. al. 2012). These and other features of climate disruption make it a challenging issue for deliberative citizen involvement.

From the standpoint of *citizens* invited to deliberate, climate change and energy transition are challenging because:

- They can feel abstract and distant from everyday concerns. They also are surrounded by dynamics of psychological distancing and dissociation.¹⁵
- The complex causation and consequences of climate change are daunting to understand and subject to polarized analyses.
- While climate change seems to require holistic solutions—from individual to societal, and from local to global—deliberation is likely to focus on actions within the capacity of a single convening government or body.

From the standpoint of a *government* convening deliberation and/or receiving deliberative recommendations, the above challenges apply, and several others:

- The policy responses required, their costs, and their payoffs stretch far into the future, but political and election cycles incentivize short-term measures and calculations.
- Public support for action on climate change is diffuse and changeable, whereas powerful stakeholders can be tightly focused on the issue.
- While many civil servants working on environmental policy regard climate change and energy transition as pressing, elected officials see it as one concern among many, many others.
- Even within a particular jurisdiction like Edmonton, policy on climate change and energy transition touches almost every domain of government operations, and thus requires action across many siloes within a large and complex institution.

Our experience with the Edmonton Citizens’ Panel suggests that the challenges facing citizen participants are tractable: information can be rendered relevant and accessible; participants can

¹⁴ The classic treatment of ‘wicked problems’ is Rittel and Webber 1973.

¹⁵ For a useful synthesis of climate psychology and communication literatures, see Shome and Marx 2009.

navigate multiple perspectives; and they can hold knowledge of the painfulness and pervasiveness of the problem while developing positive recommendations focused on a single jurisdiction. The challenges facing government are tougher to negotiate, as our analysis below bears out.

2. 3. Distinctive Challenges of Climate Deliberation in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Alberta is an interesting jurisdiction to do citizen and policy work on climate change. It has a deeply rooted conservative and populist political tradition, and the provincial Progressive Conservative party has held power uninterrupted since 1971 (though it is now under threat from the Wild Rose Party to its right). Fossil fuel resources have made Alberta an engine of the Canadian economy and the fastest growing revenue in this sector comes from the province's tar sands, the third-largest crude oil reserve in the world, expensive and energy-intensive to extract. There is an intense environmental politics around the tar sands,¹⁶ which affect companies' ability to move and sell the resource,¹⁷ and Canada's ability to meet its GHG reduction targets under the Copenhagen Agreement. Alberta's electricity is generated mainly by burning coal. The jurisdiction is heavily dependent on oil and gas royalties for prosperity (given a 10% flat income tax and no provincial sales tax, provincial revenues fluctuate dramatically with energy prices). The Provincial government is strongly committed to sustaining this economic sector, ideologically resistant to stringent regulation, and committed to managing public perceptions of the environmental effects of resource extraction. For all of these reasons, public participation on environmental and energy issues is carefully managed, and perceived by both civil servants and elected officials as high risk.

Since 2006 Canada, too, has had a Conservative government with strong party roots in Alberta. The federal government is vigorously committed to the prosperity of the oil and gas sector, including spending tens of millions of dollars on advertising and foreign lobbying around pipeline construction (Goldenberg 2013). It has been highly critical of environmental groups opposing oil sands development¹⁸ and active in rolling back environmental regulations.¹⁹ The Canadian government has admitted that it will achieve only about half its Copenhagen commitment to reduce GHGs to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 (see Leach 2014; and for broader context see Simpson et. al. 2007; and Homer-Dixon and Garrison 2010). This has not been an auspicious context for public participation in policy processes on energy and climate.

¹⁶ This politics extends to how to label the resource. 'Tar sands' was the widely used label until the mid-1990s, when industry and government advocates for the resource sought to improve public perceptions by rebranding it as 'oil sands'.

¹⁷ There are intense debates over pipelines (e.g. Keystone XL), and shipping oil by rail.

¹⁸ In an open letter on January 9, 2012, Federal Environment Minister Joe Oliver attacked those opposing pipeline construction as "environmental and other radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our trade" (Oliver 2014). Canadian environmental groups have been excluded from public hearings, subjected to Revenue Canada audits for excessive political activity, and accused by Members of Parliament of being fronts for foreign organizations and powers.

¹⁹ See, for example, Manning Environmental Law 2012.

Alberta’s capitol, Edmonton—a city of 878,000 people—presents a more complex picture. Home to one of Canada’s largest universities, Edmonton is a politically progressive city relative to the province as a whole.²⁰ In keeping with a broader tendency in North America, cities in Alberta are apt to be bolder and more innovative in addressing climate change than higher level jurisdictions (though they too are economically dependent on fossil fuel extraction as well as coal generated power). The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has led the Partners for Climate Protection network since 1994, with over 240 municipalities committing to reduce emissions; there are 19 members in Alberta, including Edmonton and Calgary, the two largest cities. While Calgary’s policy commitments around corporate and community GHG emissions began in 2002, including through extensive stakeholder and community consultation (City of Calgary 2006), Edmonton’s first major legislative step was with *The Way We Green* (TWWG), an environmental strategic plan (City of Edmonton 2011) that eventually gave rise the Edmonton Citizens’ Panel.

3 The Edmonton Citizens’ Panel: Collaboration, Deliberation, and Outcomes

3.1. Development of the Citizens’ Panel Collaboration

Soon after ABCD received its funding, we connected with mid-level officials in the City’s Office of Environment, a small unit within the Department of Sustainable Development. The City was still developing TWWG using bits of citizen involvement—online polling and communications outreach by interns—but relying mainly on work by civil servants, consulting technical experts, and extensive stakeholder engagement. The stakeholder process motivated the City to include a chapter on energy and climate change that committed the City to becoming ‘carbon neutral’. This turned out to be the most controversial element of TWWG, especially in the eyes of the powerful development industry, which saw a threat to continued suburban expansion. After heated debate, Council passed TWWG but instructed Administration to bring back implementation plans before taking any action.

Given controversy around the climate and energy chapter of TWWG, it seemed a useful place to engage citizens in new ways to understand how the City could set and meet carbon reduction and energy resiliency goals, and sustain support for this policy direction. Citizen involvement was important to our contacts in Office of Environment as a way to gauge the appetite within diverse publics for energy transition measures, once citizens understood the challenges and opportunities; to get recommendations about particular trade offs in light of public values and priorities; and to show that these recommendations derived from a fair, balanced, and representative citizen process.

From an early stage, we gravitated toward a representative mini-public. Key ABCD members had expertise in this approach, and the City had recently experimented with a Citizen Panel on the Budget (2009).²¹ A randomly recruited Citizens’ Panel model made sense for a number of further reasons. One

²⁰ In the 2006 federal election, the city (nicknamed ‘Redmonton’) denied the Conservatives a sweep of the province, electing a member of the left-leaning NDP in one of its ridings.

²¹ See: http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/public_involvement/citizen-panel.aspx.



was the importance of random recruitment to our City partners: they wanted to be able to tell Council that the citizens involved were not ‘the usual suspects’ but reflected the full diversity of the city. Another was the perceived need for a relatively long duration deliberation given complex issues and policy choices. The third was awareness of positive experiences with similar citizen processes in other Canadian jurisdictions like the British Columbia and Ontario Citizens’ Assemblies on Electoral Reform (Rose 2007; Warren and Pearse 2007).

Our Office of Environment partners came to this model with genuine interest and excitement, but their perspectives were shaped by other experiences with citizen involvement, which were mainly outreach and education initiatives, town hall meetings, focus groups, and polling. Their ability to understand and appreciate more deliberative methods was helped by the Centre for Public Involvement’s entry into the partnership, as this University-City body had run the Citizen Panel on the Budget and helped to familiarize some civil servants with deliberative models.

The willingness of Office of Environment to step into an ambitious citizen involvement exercise was supported by Don Iveson, then a young City Councilor charged with the environment file (and now Edmonton’s Mayor). He was instrumental in passing TWWG, deeply concerned about climate change, and enthusiastic about convening a deliberative mini-public. He emerged as a key advocate for the citizen process, though he was overt in respecting the division of roles between elected officials and City administration. Since the Office of Environment was in charge of developing energy transition policy, he did not want to be seen as pushing them in one direction or another. We believe that his involvement was helpful, however, in persuading the Office of Environment to develop plans for citizen deliberation with ABCD and CPI.

The passage of time as the partnership developed had implications for the shape of the citizen process. As our meetings stretched over about a year, other work was underway to build an energy transition strategy—in particular, Office of Environment retained consultants to develop an ‘Energy Transition Discussion Paper’ that explored policy levers available to the City around carbon and energy resiliency, and made recommendations that would put the City on a low carbon path (Pembina Institute and HB Lanarc 2012). This technical document laid out six goals and associated actions involving large industry, land use and transportation, buildings and distributed energy, provincial electricity grid, and vehicles. This document ended up being a foundation for framing and information used by the Citizens’ Panel.

The placement of the Citizens’ Panel at a relatively late stage of the policy making process fit with established practice in Edmonton. Civil servants typically begin with formal or informal stakeholder engagement to establish the scope and orientation of policy development; they next engage internal and consultant experts to give shape to policy, checking in informally with elected officials; then, once the policy has been drafted, citizens are engaged, whether to comply with a statutory obligation to consult, or to make real adjustments to reflect citizen concerns.

3. 2. The Citizens’ Panel

Within the City/ABCD/CPI collaboration, we wrestled with how to ensure that the mini-public connected the Discussion Paper to broader framings of climate change and energy; gave participants space to bring their own agency and frames of reference to the issue rather than being swamped with technical information seen as salient by civil servants in Office of Environment; ensured influence for the Panel; and gave participants scope to explore new policy directions given their own values and priorities, while still speaking to the actual policy openings. The trust within the collaboration and our ability to respectfully hold differences enabled us to build a process that met our diverse expectations and needs, though not without continuing points of tension. The following are some of the key elements of process design.²²

(a) Participant recruitment

The mini-public model of citizen deliberation emphasizes the recruitment of diverse citizens. Our Office of Environment partners were not only enthusiastic about assembling a demographically representative sample of City residents, but believed that Panel recommendations would have most weight with City Council if we ensured attitudinal diversity. We used a professional polling firm to recruit sixty-six demographically representative residents who agreed to participate (given an honorarium of \$400) in six days of deliberation (we wanted to be sure to have fifty-five participants by the end of the process, and anticipated some attrition). The recruitment process surveyed belief in anthropogenic climate change and targeted a threshold number of skeptics. Further, we recruited a threshold number of people directly dependent on the energy industry for their livelihood (or that of an immediate family member). We ensured that at least two participants came from each of the twelve municipal electoral wards.

(b) Duration and focus of deliberation

Panelists met for six days of deliberation between October and December 2012, supported by two lead designer/facilitators and a team of volunteer facilitators and note takers. They deliberated on energy transition policy for Edmonton, deciding between business as usual, 'reduced carbon', and 'low carbon' pathways (Pembina Institute and HB Lanarc 2012). Substantial time was spent on how the City should achieve carbon reductions (e.g. lobbying to green the provincial grid, increasing the energy efficiency of new and old buildings, supporting district and renewable energy systems, influencing vehicle use, working for a more compact urban form and transit-centered development).

(c) Accessible information

To complement the Energy Transition Discussion Paper, we provided a participant handbook in advance (City of Edmonton 2012), which we supplemented as the deliberation proceeded. It described how the Panel would work, outlined how policymaking happens in Edmonton, summarized research on climate change and energy vulnerability, including Edmonton's present energy situation and possible

²² A more detailed discussion of the Citizens' Panel process can be found in MacKinnon et. al., forthcoming. This section draws on elements of that Working Paper.

energy future, and discussed values, risk, uncertainty, and the trustworthiness of scientific methods and claims.

(d) Issue framing

Panel deliberations were framed in terms of interlinked challenges of energy and climate in Edmonton. This had both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, the local framing was tangible rather than abstract, encouraging participants to think concretely about choices at the neighborhood and municipal level. The framing emerged from a real policy process underway in Edmonton, and so increased the relevance of the deliberation. The Discussion Paper upon which the deliberations centered had been vetted by diverse stakeholders, supporting confidence in its balance and reliability—although not every panelist shared this confidence (Hobbs 2013).

This framing also presented challenges. Given the Discussion Paper’s focus on Edmonton, relatively little time was available to draw out the national and global dimensions of climate and energy issues. Nor was Alberta’s fossil fuel sector a significant focus in the deliberations. Some ABCD members were concerned that the framing would constrain citizens from exploring avenues and options beyond those featured in the Discussion Paper, and that this would narrow the scope and parameters of the Panel’s work. Some panelists expressed frustration with the scope of the Discussion Paper and wanted a broader framing of the issues.

(e) Diversity of methods

Civil servants from Office of Environment were focused on the importance of participants absorbing information about climate change and energy, favoring a didactic approach in the early sessions. ABCD and CPI emphasized that principles of adult education and citizen participation called for a range of ways for participants to absorb learning and to deliberate. The design purposely kept the volume and complexity of information moderate in the first session and then ramped up in the next two sessions. A stakeholder roundtable presented diverse perspectives on energy and climate, while videos and expert presentations covered issues like climate science, local impacts, local energy use, climate psychology, and policy complexity. Some work was done visually, some with words (e.g. flip charts and post-it notes), some with images and some through physical movement in space. Participants deliberated at tables in small groups, in pairs or triads, and as a whole Panel. In the fourth and fifth sessions we incorporated an interactive ‘carousel’ process, with participants cycling through small group discussions on key policy levers, with city staff and other experts serving as resources.

Deliberation included a strong focus on values. While those from Office of Environment emphasized technical and scientific dimensions of climate and energy issues, ABCD and CPI pushed successfully to spread technical learning through the panel rather than making it the exclusive entry point, and to incorporate extensive inquiry into values and principles. Panelists were asked to bring their lived experiences into the deliberation, exploring and understanding each other’s values as well as value tensions that underlie different policy choices.

Deliberation also sought to keep embodied, emotional dimensions of participants' experiences in view. For example, the first session had participants select a photo that captured their feelings about energy and climate issues, which provided a context for sharing hopes, concerns and fears. In a later session, an expert on climate psychology supported further reflection by panelists on how we process information about climate and energy, and how emotion can work for and against commitment and action on these issues.

(f) Moving from deliberation to decision

Sessions four to six involved deliberation on trade offs and policies. This entailed structured small group and plenary activities, as well as iterative keypad voting to identify points of convergence and divergence, see which recommendations cleared a threshold of acceptability (defined as 80% support), and which ones needed further deliberation.

Given our attention to recruiting for demographic and attitudinal diversity, the degree of convergence on recommendations came as a surprise to many (though it is congruent with experiences in other public deliberation exercises). There were a number of supports for convergence:

- Using time, space and structure to create trust and empathy across differences. A palpable sense of comradeship arose in the Panel, notwithstanding enduring diversities of perspective. Over time, participants developed respect for one another's views and found ways to craft recommendations that included multiple perspectives. For example, some participants placed a premium on fiscal responsibility and cost/benefit analysis; this survived as a collectively endorsed value, but with caveats about the importance of the collective good, and the multiple dimensions of 'cost' and 'benefit'. Trust (and dynamics of participant leadership) within the Panel also enabled quick decisions without a lot of deliberation, as when a recommendation urging the City to 'go faster, go further' emerged late in the process, and gained majority (though not 80%) support.
- Focusing on outcomes rather than differences in ideology and understandings of the causes of climate change. This enabled participants to support common policy measures for divergent reasons. For example, the Panel recommended that the City invest in denser, transit-centered development: for some, this was important mainly for carbon reduction reasons, whereas for others the attraction was in considerations of health and quality of life.
- Drawing on participants' sense of collective duty and responsibility to bring their best thinking to bear and come up with good recommendations.

3. 3. Panel Recommendations

Conveners supported the panelists in authoring a Final Report (City of Edmonton 2013) that communicated two key policy recommendations: (1) that the City of Edmonton takes the measures needed to become a low carbon city by 2050; and (2) that the City implement the six goals and associated actions proposed in the *Energy Transition Discussion Paper*, though with important qualifications. For example:

- Participants supported the Discussion Paper recommendation to increase the proportion of development that created compact, mixed-used, transit-oriented neighborhoods within already developed areas of the city, but with the caveat that the City must ensure that the impact of these actions is equitable, that development decisions are made transparently, and that public safety is enhanced.
- Participants supported the Discussion Paper recommendation to increase the uptake of distributed energy generation through barrier removal, capacity building, incentives, and regulations, but urged the City to raise the targets set for this goal, particularly around on-site energy generation in larger new buildings.

The Panel included two additional recommendations that received majority (though not 80%) support: (1) that the City set strong, measurable targets for energy transition in a five-year time frame; and (2) that the ‘Low Carbon Case’ be viewed as setting a good but minimal standard for energy transition, and that the City aim to move further and faster than this.

These recommendations were framed in terms of key principles and values that participants articulated as parameters for their deliberations, and that they urged upon the City as a basis for work on energy transition.

- Principles:
 1. Weigh costs and benefits for each energy transition action while keeping the seriousness of climate and energy challenges firmly in view.
 2. Use public and transparent decision-making so that citizens are confident that energy transition decisions serve the public good.
 3. Link City leadership to citizen education so that the public and the City remain aligned.
 4. Recognize and promote multiple reasons for energy transition, so that diverse Edmontonians can find reasons to support a low carbon future.
- Values:
 1. Sustainability, defined as our society’s ability to endure over a prolonged period of time as an integral part of the Earth’s natural systems.
 2. Equity, so that energy transition measures positively address inequity while mitigating impacts on the vulnerable; increase the wellbeing of present and future generations; and consider the needs of business while making sure that impacts do not fall disproportionately on citizens and consumers.
 3. Quality of Life, which includes social justice, public health, safety, security, neighborhood character and beauty, and affordable living.
 4. Balancing individual freedom and the public good, with an emphasis on removing City barriers to sustainable choices, using regulation only where incentives and regulation cannot achieve the same goals, and making City decisions that support the longer-term quality of life of Edmontonians where this conflicts with the freedom of individuals to satisfy present day wants.

Panellists presented their recommendations and Final Report to Executive Committee of City Council in April 2013, and the Office of Environment was directed to bring back an Energy Transition Strategy based on these recommendations as well as other inputs. This Strategy is currently in draft form, and is expected to come before City Council in fall 2014.

4 Political and Structural Challenges

The Citizens' Panel process was impressive in many ways, and the decisions reached by participants showed the ability of citizen deliberation to find wise paths forward even on complex and controversial issues like climate change and energy transition. As a deliberative mini-public, though, the core goal was influence on policy processes and there the jury is still out. The most recent draft Energy Transition Strategy is congruent with most Panel recommendations, and repeatedly references the Panel's work; this does not necessarily show that the Panel significantly affected the trajectory of policy development relative to what it would otherwise have been. Moreover, it is not yet clear how Council will receive the Energy Transition Strategy, or how the Panel's existence and recommendations will affect Council debates and decisions.

From our standpoint as designers and facilitators of the Citizens' Panel process, there were three elements of design—paths not taken—that could have increased its influence.

4. 1. Linking 'invited space' deliberation to community organizations and action

ABCD arose out of a deliberative democracy community with diverse understandings of the role of community organizing and action in social and political change. Some scholars and organizations in ABCD emphasize 'invited space' participation like mini-publics; others see political change as tied crucially to processes that mobilize communities and support community action. ABCD and CPI's initial deliberation proposal to the City combined an invited mini-public with community-based dialogue and action. We proposed to involve community organizations as resources during the deliberation, and to work with citizen participants after the deliberation to support community outreach and community-based projects.

One advantage of this structure would have been to sustain Panelist involvement beyond the point of authoring a Final Report. The version of the Panel we ended up with gave panelists a more restricted role and influence. Panelists were recruited from the general population for the deliberative process; few of them had any involvement with the issue before being recruited. They participated actively from the first until the last meeting of the Panel, with a small number continued in defined roles (the Citizens' Writing Team that generated the Final Report). Once these formal participatory roles were complete, the group ceased to exist as a Panel (and our City partners were explicit that following the Final Report, there was no longer a Panel that could express positions or make recommendations, only ex-Panelists). Communication with these ex-Panelists is being sustained by ABCD and CPI until the Energy Transition Strategy goes to Council, with opportunities for them to testify as members of the public at public hearings. An opportunity is also being created for them to provide informal feedback on a draft of the

Energy Transition Strategy. Some Panelists have eagerly embraced these roles, but the range of roles is limited.

A second advantage of that initial proposal would have been to build connections between the mini-public and the organized capacities of civil society. Deliberation by a demographically representative group of citizens resonates with democratic norms of representation and legitimacy.²³ But participants are likely to lack expertise, mobilizing capacity, and critical capacity possessed by civic organizations that have been focused on a given issue over a long period. There would have been real gains in weaving these organizations more extensively into the work of the Panel (see Hendriks 2011; Kahane et. al. 2014).

In the event, our plan for a mini-public with strong civil society involvement—which was developed to the point of a detailed proposal and budget, and that got all the way to final signature stage—was rejected by Office of Environment for reasons that remain obscure. In the subsequent version of the Panel that we carried out, there were points of civil society involvement: civic organizations had the chance to vet briefing materials, observe the deliberation, and in some cases present to Panelists. But deepening these connections might have increased the profile, influence, and action capacity of the project.

4. 2. Strong Decision Maker Commitment

There were other twists and turns in our collaboration with the City, including around their commitment to give uptake to Panel recommendations. We wrestled with questions like:

- Would the Panel be a formal initiative of City Council or of City Administration?
- Would there be any direct commitment from Council to seriously consider the Panel's recommendations?
- At what stage would Panel recommendations go to Council—as decision items in their own right, or items for information, or a companion document to an Energy Transition Strategy that Administration would author with Panel input?
- Would there be formal feedback to Panelists about which of their recommendations were followed, which weren't, and why?

In the end, the Panel was an initiative of the Office of Environment, and Council did not give formal assent to the Panel in advance. There was a commitment from Office of Environment to seriously consider the Panel's recommendations in developing an Energy Transition Strategy; to provide feedback on which recommendations were adopted, not adopted, and why; and to have the Panel's Final Report travel to Council as a companion document to the Energy Transition Strategy. The Final Report was ultimately brought to Executive Committee of City Council as an item for information. Seven Panelists presented their findings, there was a lively and respectful exchange with Council, and Administration was sent away to develop a strategy.

²³ Though for a challenge to representative claims for mini-publics see Parkinson 2006.

The many twists and turns in determining how the Panel would fit into the flow of City decision making was influenced, in at least some ways, by political tensions within City government. As we were developing the Panel, and especially in the months leading up to the launch, the Office of Environment had some difficult encounters with Council. Our then Mayor was not shy about criticizing civil servants before Council about policy that did not please him. So there was a tone, in our work with our City partner, of risk averseness and second guessing what would anger or please Council. Edmonton also has a development industry that has lobbied strongly against any controls on suburban expansion, and a Chamber of Commerce that was critical of *The Way We Green*. Both have traditionally been very influential with Council. So a sequence of decisions about how to articulate the Citizens' Panel with Council were made in the shadow of risk management if not risk aversion by civil servants.

We see this as part of a broader tendency in governments in Canada, from municipalities to provinces to the federal level: cultures of civil service are changing, with decreasing autonomy in policy development, and a sense of risk if policies that are advanced do not fit with the perspectives of elected officials. So officials second guess the reactions or wishes of politicians (without actually presenting them with different options).

We believe that a stronger linkage to political decision making might have built a more emphatic sense of accountability to Citizens' Panel recommendations—though this is untestable in this single case. Stronger linkage could have taken the form of Council itself authorizing the Panel, as well as committing to seriously consider its recommendations, and to provide an account of how recommendations influenced formal decisions.

4. 3. Public and Transparent Process

ABCD saw a strong connection between the public visibility of citizen deliberation processes and their impact; we had emphasized the importance of media and social media work from the start of our collaboration with the City. There was a precedent for this in Edmonton's Citizens' Panel on the Budget, and also a Citizens' Panel on Citywide Food and Agriculture Policy:²⁴ both had been prominent in the press, and had shared video and reports from deliberations as they unfolded.

In the months leading up to the Panel, a City publicity person was brought into our planning meetings; we discussed a press launch of the Panel beforehand, media presence during the deliberation, and coverage of the Final Report. As the Citizens' Panel got closer our City partners were increasingly cautious about publicity. Among other things, they worried about being seen to pressure Council, and about opposition gathering in advance of Panel recommendations being formally developed. Communication plans were scaled back again and again; in the end, there was no press work in advance of or during the Panel.²⁵ We planned a media launch for the Panel's Final Report, but here too the City

²⁴ See: http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/food-and-urban-agriculture.aspx.

²⁵ The discussion of publicity revealed some dissonances between the City and ABCD/CPI around what the deliberation was about: for example, one City staff member was worried that press presence would taint the views

pulled back, asking that press contact happen in conjunction with the item going to Council Executive at a later date. So there was no formal press contact from the inception of Panel planning until a press conference immediately after the Final Report went to Council Executive. If you searched carefully on the City website you could find a description of the Panel, and links to the Citizens' Handbook and the Discussion Paper, or if you knew where to look on Twitter and Facebook you could find ABCD and CPI updates during and after the Panel.

Our desire for stronger links to broader publics was shaped by scholarship showing that public opinion and trust can be influenced by understanding the *process* of a citizen deliberation, even if details of subject matter remain obscure (Cutler et. al. 2007). We also were persuaded by both scholarship and experience suggesting that the more publicly visible a deliberative process, the more decision makers feel bound to give serious consideration to its recommendations (Parkinson 2006).

5 Lessons from the Edmonton Citizens' Panel

There were many positive outcomes from the Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges:

- Citizen participants felt empowered and positive about their experiences on the Panel.
- Panel recommendations showed that diverse citizens can find common cause around ambitious carbon mitigation and energy resilience strategies at the municipal level.
- City Administration was pleased with the outcome, and increased their capacity to engage intelligently with innovative citizen involvement methods.
- Formal procedural commitments to receive and respond to the Panel, as outlined above, were honored.
- Councilors received the Panel's recommendations with apparent interest, and innovation and improvement in citizen involvement were prominent issues during the October 2013 municipal election (though the Citizens' Panel could at most claim to be one among many causes of this).

And there is much that we don't know about the Panel:

- What impact—subtle or direct—it ultimately will have on the forthcoming Energy Transition Strategy and its political reception.
- The longer term impact of the deliberation on public attitudes and behaviors around climate, energy and democratic/civic engagement.
- Whether a similar level of effort, supported by similar resources, dedicated to community level engagement and working with a diversity of civil society organizations could have achieved more sustainable impact on Edmonton's energy and climate plans.

of participants and thus corrupt the research validity of the deliberation (suggesting that it was seen as a focus group rather than a politically engaged exercise for citizens with their own networks and sources of information).

What place, then, do deliberative mini-publics have in building intelligent and effective responses to climate and energy challenges? Our experience with the Edmonton Citizens' Panel points to the need for mini-publics to find an effective place in complex democratic ecosystems.

a) Government as part of a democratic ecosystem for mini-publics

Deliberative mini-publics on climate change will be most effective when:

- There is healthy communication and between civil servants and elected officials, and both are involved in creating a mini-public and committing to giving serious consideration to its recommendations.
- Cultures of policy making shift away from a closed, expert-driven model to more genuinely collaborative approaches, and experience and capacity are developed to support this. Such a cultural shift in turn requires a recognition over time that progress on key files *requires* deep collaboration with communities and stakeholders (as well as across siloes within government): that closed, expert-driven approaches cannot deliver effective and sustainable results. This recognition supports willingness to take risks in designing policy processes, and in developing policy in public view.
- Policy development transcends the short termism of electoral cycles and reactivity to swings in public opinion. This requires changes within cultures of government, and also in the democratic capacity and culture of broader communities.

Those building public deliberation projects around climate change need to assess these conditions, connect with strengths where they exist, and work to build strength and capacity in government where it does not yet exist.

b) Civil society as part of a democratic ecosystem for mini-publics

Deliberative mini-publics on climate change will be most effective if they connect with existing organizations and ferment in civil society—the assemblage of networks, associations, and organizations formed by communities outside the domain of the state.

Some of these connections are part of the bread and butter of mini-public design and were noted already: getting help from civic organizations in recruiting participants; vetting briefing materials with diverse stakeholder groups; inviting representatives of organizations to address a citizens' panel; and so on. These methods may only scratch the surface, though, of possible relationships.

(1) A key step in understanding how a mini-public can connect with civil society is recognizing that deliberative democracy takes many forms in many spaces. Those developing a deliberation on climate change need to ask: where are conversations, debates, and collaborations already happening around this issue? There may be other sites of “invited micro-level participation” like mini-publics; “invited macro/informal participation” including public debates on climate and energy as well as activity spurred by outreach and change initiatives; and “uninvited participation” including protests, direct action, and citizen science (Chilvers and Longhurst 2012: 9-10). A new mini-public needs to learn from these existing

processes and connect with them. There are tensions in such connections: one of the appeals of creating a new invited space with randomly selected participants is that it can appear insulated from existing players, agendas, and debates. Moreover, civil society organizations may not always be interested in or suited to a deliberation that seeks to move beyond established positions and debates.²⁶ But these challenges need to be weighed against benefits that may flow from linking with groups already active on issues relating to the mini-public; these benefits include learning, legitimacy, and sustainable political influence and community action.

(2) The organized and wild publics that deliberate and act on climate and energy issues in a particular place rely on practice, orchestration, coordination, and study by a further set of actors, including academics, participation institutions, think tanks, scientists, and deliberation practitioners (Chilvers 2012). These constitute further parts of the civic ecosystem in which any given mini-public will be located, and sites of potential collaboration. ABCD, CPI, and the City had strong connections to these kinds of networks, though we may not have used them to full advantage.

(3) We wrote above about the importance within governments of healthy communication, trust, and a willingness to develop policy and action collaboratively. These same capacities are important within and between civil society organizations and movements. In some contexts, civil society movements and organizations around energy and climate may be well networked with each other, and skilled at collaboration. (Note that the reach of climate and energy issues extends well beyond groups that would typically describe these issues as their focus.) In other contexts, communication, trust, and collaboration may need to be built—including through common work to design and sustain a particular mini-public and its political influence.

Connecting with the complex networks and movements in civil society is crucial for the success of mini-publics. Formal and informal links with civic groups can support the cross-partisan legitimacy of a mini-public. They also can increase visibility, communication, and outreach capacity. They can provide rich resources as participants in a mini-public learn about issues and find ways to act in their communities after the formal participatory space has closed.

Linking a formally constituted mini-public with movements and groups in civil society can be politically complex and fraught, but also can produce civic energy and pressure that supports the mini-public's influence. Difficult bureaucratic and political forces are bound to surround the movement of recommendations from a mini-public into government policy and action. When an active and engaged citizenry organized through civic organizations is part of the momentum behind the recommendations of a mini-public, this can strengthen odds for follow-through by government. We need, in John Gaventa's words, to work both sides of the equation: "As participatory approaches are scaled up from projects to policies, they inevitably enter the arenas of government, and find that participation can only become effective as it engages with issues of institutional change. And, as concerns about good

²⁶ For more on complexities of linking 'stakeholder' and 'citizen' participation in public deliberation, see Hendriks 2011, Kahane et al 2013.



governance and state responsiveness grow, questions about how citizens engage and make demands on the state also come to the fore” (Gaventa 2003: 2).

The mini-public approach to citizen deliberation sits alongside many other strategies and methods within and outside government—from expert policy development, to public mobilization and pressure, to grassroots problem solving and construction of alternatives. Because we in ABCD see state action as such an important element of climate responses, and because we see how polarization, psychological denial, ad hoc thinking, and inertia obstruct climate action, we believe citizen deliberation is valuable. But we also see how difficult it can be to meaningfully incorporate deep citizen work into policy development on climate change.

All of this points to the slowness of citizen deliberation, which may seem to be in tension with the urgency of climate action. Deliberative democracy aims to foster a different type of citizenship and democracy—this cannot happen quickly and will take concerted efforts by civil society and political allies. In some respects, at least, we may need to ‘go slow to go fast’. Earlier in the paper we noted the description of climate change as a ‘super-wicked’ problem; the authors of that paper argue that this genre of problem calls for policy responses that are difficult to reverse, that entrench support over time, and that expand the population supporting the policy (Levin et. al. 2012). The lessons we have drawn about building and drawing upon communication, trust, and collaborative capacity in government and civil society do point to a slower temporality; but they also create conditions for policy effectiveness and resiliency. The Citizens’ Panel on Edmonton’s Energy and Climate Challenges played a valuable but limited role in this kind of deep cultural and political change. We have sought to describe conditions and design choices that could give citizen deliberation greater impact.

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