



Land use planning in a changing climate

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Issue

Land use decisions made today can lock in climate risk for decades, potentially leading to loss of life, damage to homes and infrastructure, and rising public costs for disaster response and recovery. As climate hazards such as floods, wildfires, and extreme heat intensify, developing in hazardous areas increases long-term risk.

At the same time, provincial and local housing initiatives are accelerating development across British Columbia to address affordability and supply shortages. These policies create a timely opportunity to ensure that new homes and infrastructure are built in locations that reduce exposure to climate hazards.

This briefing note draws on [*Where We Build Matters: Land use planning for safety, affordability, and resilience*](#), a recent report and [companion video](#) by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions.

Key Findings

- **Land use planning roles are decentralized.** The Province provides legislation and policy direction, while local governments have primary authority for land use planning and discretion to identify and manage climate hazards.
- **Climate-informed land use remains uneven across B.C.** The adoption of planning tools that address climate risk varies widely between jurisdictions and hazards, resulting in risks being addressed incrementally and reactively. This can lead to potential loss of life, increased disaster losses and public expenditures, and fewer opportunities to avoid or reduce exposure.
- **Systemic challenges limit proactive risk reduction.** Local governments make land use decisions within a complex policy environment that includes competing priorities, existing development patterns and constrained budgets, staffing, and technical capacity. Misalignment between who makes land use decisions and who bears disaster recovery costs can further discourage risk reduction.
- **Strong provincial coordination is needed.** Evidence shows that effective climate-informed land use planning depends on accessible hazard information, clear planning direction, and alignment between land use decisions and financial incentives. In B.C., the challenge is not a lack of tools, but the need for stronger coordination and alignment to reduce climate risk.

Recommendations

Integrating climate risk into land use decisions can advance housing supply, affordability, and cost of living objectives while reducing long-term disaster costs and infrastructure liabilities. As governments accelerate housing development, they face a critical policy window to reduce exposure to climate risks.



This report identifies actions to strengthen climate-informed land use decisions.

1 **Increase data-driven decision-making**

Develop accessible, standardized, and parcel-level climate hazard information for land use planning across B.C.

- Establish an arms-length body responsible for publishing information.
- Introduce public disclosure requirements for climate hazard exposure in real estate and rental transactions.

2 **Coordinate and direct climate-informed land use planning**

Coordinate Ministry mandates and create clear directions for local governments to make climate-informed land use decisions.

- Align land use planning, housing delivery, emergency management, climate adaptation, and reconciliation objectives.
- Ensure local governments have clear direction, tools, and supports to regulate development in hazardous areas.

3 **Align risk reduction with financial incentives**

Align and directly link financial incentives with long-term risk reduction actions through disaster financial assistance and insurance.

- Reform disaster financial assistance to discourage new exposure and increase resilience over time.
- Monitor insurance market signals to identify where risks are growing and/or becoming unmanageable.

Additional Context

- *Where We Build Matters: Land Use Planning for Safety, Affordability, and Resilience* is an independent report by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions that examines how climate risks are currently addressed in British Columbia's land use planning system.
- The analysis reviews provincial legislation, planning tools, and governance structures that influence how land use and development decisions are made across the province.
- The report identifies gaps and opportunities to strengthen coordination between land use planning, climate adaptation, and emergency management to reduce long-term exposure to climate hazards.
- The report and companion video were funded by the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness.

About the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS)

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) was created in 2008 with an endowment from the Government of British Columbia to advance evidence-based climate policy. Through its multi-university structure, PICS mobilizes applied research and partnerships to support climate-informed decision-making across government.