Spokane Climate Planning

Phase 2 Focus Groups Engagement Summary

January 2026

Themes, Lived Experience, & Policy Design Insights

Focus Group–Specific Insights for Policy Development

Prepared for the City of Spokane by:

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Spokane Climate Planning - Phase 2 Focus Groups

Themes, Lived Experience, & Policy Design Insights

Prepared for the City of Spokane by Alex Panagotacos Consulting, LLC in 2025/26 for the PlanSpokane 2046 Climate Element

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Purpose of This Document

This document synthesizes cross-cutting themes and policy-relevant insights from Phase 2 Climate Planning focus groups held in November and December of 2025, including Youth, Climate Justice, Food Security, and Barriers to Access* sessions. It is intended to support City staff, Planning, and the Climate Resilience & Sustainability Board in translating lived experience into climate goals, policy directions, and implementation approaches.

All insights are grounded in participant input. Direct quotes are used when possible and only where they appear verbatim in focus group notes. No individual names are included.

This document is broken in the following sections. They are hyperlinked below for your convenience:

1. **TL;DR / Executive Summary:** A concise summary of key findings from the Phase 2 climate focus groups.
2. **Cross-cutting Themes:** Major themes that emerged across focus groups, outlined in detail and grounded in participant lived experience.
3. **Implications & Recommendations:** Key takeaways and practical opportunities the City may consider as it develops, implements, and communicates climate goals and policies.

**Note that we also offered a digital survey to the Barriers to Access focus group due to a technological issue that limited participation.*

TL;DR / Executive Summary

Phase 2 climate focus groups highlighted that residents understand climate change through lived experience and practical realities, not technical or abstract framing. Participants across focus groups described climate impacts as already shaping daily decisions and compounding existing challenges, particularly for people with fewer resources or less flexibility.

Participants expressed broad support for climate action and appreciation for the City's efforts to engage community members in this work. At the same time, discussions surfaced concerns about how policies play out over time—especially when responsibility, maintenance, or long-term support are unclear.

The focus groups also revealed variation in how residents access information and engage with City efforts. While some participants are highly familiar with City processes, others reported difficulty understanding what is happening, what resources exist, or how to participate. Trust was closely tied to clarity, consistency, and communication methods that feel credible and accessible.

Across sessions, participants emphasized that engagement is most meaningful when it is useful, respectful, and sustained. Opportunities that build shared understanding, offer tangible benefit, and demonstrate how community input informs next steps were seen as essential to effective and equitable climate planning.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The following themes are discussed in greater detail in the following section:

1. Climate is experienced as daily wellbeing, not an abstract issue.
2. Well-intended policies can shift burden without lifecycle planning.
3. Climate impacts compound existing inequities.
4. Access to Climate Programs Depends on Awareness, Trust, and Communication Channels.
5. Residents want practical, hands-on engagement that provides immediate value.
6. Ongoing engagement is viewed as part of climate justice.
7. What makes a climate policy effective is clarity, accountability, and follow-through.

Implications & Recommendations

The final section of the document explores how these themes may impact planning and what the City can do to nurture success and improve where needed:

1. Design policies with full lifecycle responsibility.
2. Use clear, action-oriented language.
3. Invest in implementation and long-term follow-through.
4. Improve public awareness of programs.
5. Use trusted, accessible communication methods.
6. Offer hands-on, practical engagement opportunities.
7. Treat engagement as an ongoing relationship.
8. Align policy, communication, and engagement strategies.
9. Partner with trusted messengers
10. Build feedback loops that show how community input is used and inform future decisions.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Cross-Cutting Theme 1: Climate Is Experienced as Daily Wellbeing, Not an Abstract Issue

Across all focus groups, participants described climate impacts in terms of daily life: health, safety, mobility, housing stability, food access, and cost of living. Climate change was not framed as a distant environmental concern, but as something already shaping routines, decisions, and stress levels.

Participant Perspectives:

- "Smoke makes people sick… it just really bums me out." (Youth)
- "Sometimes it's so hot I can't risk going outside." (Youth)
- "What used to be… I grew up in Spokane—we didn't have a smoke season." (Barriers to Access)
- "Economically this is top of mind. How expensive utility bills and other bills to meet needs in extreme temperatures." (Climate Justice)

Key insight: Climate resilience is inseparable from housing quality, transportation reliability, food systems, and public health.

Cross-Cutting Theme 2: Well-Intended Climate Policies Can Create New Burdens

Participants across groups expressed strong support for climate actions such as tree planting, infrastructure improvements, and environmental upgrades. At the same time, they raised concerns about how costs, maintenance, and responsibility often fall on residents—particularly renters, elders, and low-income households—when long-term planning and support are missing.

Participant Perspectives:

- "We cut our tree down because one was dying and going to fall on our house and we can't afford a stump removal." (Youth)
- "There are space heaters in every room in old house." (Barriers to Access)

Key insight: When residents cannot afford the downstream costs of climate investments—such as stump removal or sidewalk repair—those investments may be permanently lost rather than temporarily disrupted. In this case, the inability to remove the stump also meant the tree was never replaced, resulting in a net loss of tree canopy despite community support for urban forestry. Without full lifecycle planning, climate policies risk shifting burden onto residents and undermining their own long-term goals.

Cross-Cutting Theme 3: Climate Impacts Compound Existing Inequities

Participants consistently named specific populations who are impacted first and hardest by climate change, including elders, renters, youth, immigrant and refugee communities, people with health conditions, and those with limited income.

Climate impacts were described as layering onto existing challenges such as housing instability, high utility costs, language barriers, and limited access to transportation.

Participant Perspectives:

- "Even 'young elders' struggle, especially without a network and resource pool." (Climate Justice)
- "Single women are losing their houses because rent has increased… Decision between food or rent." (Food Security)

Key insight: Climate policy effectiveness depends on recognizing how impacts stack across systems rather than treating climate as a standalone issue. Policies that do not account for existing economic, housing, health, and access barriers risk widening

inequities by benefiting those with greater capacity to adapt while leaving the most impacted communities further behind. Integrating equity considerations across housing, transportation, utilities, food access, and health systems is essential to ensuring climate strategies reduce—rather than reinforce—existing disparities.

Cross-Cutting Theme 4: Access to Climate Programs Depends on Awareness, Trust, and Communication Channels

A notable contrast emerged between focus groups composed of highly civically engaged participants (Climate Justice, Food Security) and those representing the general public (Youth, Barriers to Access). Participants in the latter groups frequently shared that they do not know which climate policies have already been enacted, do not understand what programs they may qualify for, and do not know how to benefit from or engage with existing City efforts.

Importantly, this gap was framed not as disinterest in climate action or City involvement, but as a lack of accessible, trusted, and consistent communication. Participants also challenged assumptions about outreach style, noting that credibility and clarity mattered more than trend-driven design.

Participant Perspectives:

- "If it's the City of Spokane…it's like, oh, I should probably open this." (Barriers to Access, referring to official mail)
- "I want to hold the paper." (Climate Justice, referring to preference for tangible, official communication)

Key insight:
Access to climate programs is shaped as much by how information is communicated as by the programs themselves. Without clear, trusted communication through channels residents recognize and rely on, climate policies and programs risk benefiting only those who are already civically engaged, limiting their reach and equity impact.

Cross-Cutting Theme 5: Residents Want Practical, Hands-On Engagement

Beyond feedback sessions, participants expressed interest in engagement that is tangible and immediately useful—such as City-sponsored workshops that help residents make older homes more climate-resilient.

Examples discussed included learning practical skills to reduce drafts or improve efficiency in aging housing stock, paired with creative or community-building activities. A participant in the Barriers to Access group suggested holding a craft workshop where you learn to knit draft snakes and learn about keeping old homes warm. This type of engagement was seen as empowering, accessible, and relationship-building.

Participant Perspectives:

- "…workshops to communicate all [the] great information." (Barriers to Access written survey response to question *How could the City make resource information more trustworthy and easier to understand?)*

Key insight:
Hands-on, skill-based engagement can lower barriers to participation, build trust, and increase the real-world impact of climate initiatives. Engagement that offers immediate value to participants may be more effective than engagement that asks for input without providing tangible support or learning opportunities.

Cross-Cutting Theme 6: Ongoing Engagement Is Part of Climate Justice

Participants in the Climate Justice and Food Security focus groups expressed interest in staying informed about how their input is used and being involved in later phases of policy development. Engagement was framed not as a one-time opportunity to provide feedback, but as an ongoing relationship between the City and community members most impacted by climate change.

Participants emphasized that being kept informed, seeing how input influences decisions, and having opportunities to stay involved over time are essential to building trust and accountability.

Participant Perspectives:

- "The importance of Community and keeping communication open is something that brings all together." (Barriers to Access w*ritten survey response to the question What is one thing you want the City of Spokane to remember from this discussion?*)
- "Nothing about us, without us." (Food Security)

Key insight:
Participants view ongoing engagement as a core component of climate justice. Sustained communication and opportunities for continued involvement help build trust,

accountability, and shared ownership of climate goals, strengthening the City's ability to implement effective and equitable climate policies.

Cross-Cutting Theme 7: What Makes a Climate Policy Effective

Participants—particularly in the Climate Justice focus group—spent significant time discussing not only *what* climate policies should address, but *how* those policies must be written, implemented, and sustained in order to be effective in practice. This discussion went beyond individual policy topics and focused on the structural qualities that determine whether a policy meaningfully improves people's lives or remains largely symbolic.

Participants emphasized that policies lose credibility when they rely on vague or passive language, lack clearly defined responsibility, or are not consistently enforced. Several participants described a disconnect between policies that exist "on paper" and what is experienced in daily life, noting that protections, commitments, or programs are only meaningful when residents can see and feel their impact over time.

A recurring concern was that policies are sometimes introduced without sufficient attention to how long they will be in effect, how they will be funded, or how they will be sustained beyond initial rollout. Participants expressed skepticism of short-term pilots or initiatives that do not include long-term investment, maintenance, or accountability mechanisms, particularly in communities that have experienced cycles of program launch followed by withdrawal.

Participants also raised concerns about enforcement gaps and the risks these create for workers and community members. In the absence of enforcement, policies intended to provide protection may place the burden of compliance or advocacy on individuals—often those with the least power or security.

Participants emphasized the need for:

- Active, clear language rather than vague or passive framing
- Defined responsibility for implementation and ongoing maintenance
- Enforcement and accountability, not just policy adoption
- Sustained investment rather than short-term or pilot-only approaches
- Policies designed to operate over a sufficient length of time to create stability and trust

- Clear measures of success and transparency about outcomes

Participant Perspectives:

- "Some protective policies are not enforced." (Climate Justice)
- "Workers often fear job loss if they assert their rights." (Climate Justice)

Key insight:
Participants define effective climate policy by its durability, enforceability, and follow-through. Policies that are clear about responsibility, funded over a sufficient time horizon, and designed with sustainability in mind are more likely to build trust and produce real-world impact. Conversely, policies that rely on passive language, lack enforcement, or are limited in duration risk failing the communities they are intended to protect and may undermine confidence in future climate initiatives.

Implications & Recommendations

Across focus groups, participants expressed appreciation for the City of Spokane's efforts to address climate impacts and for the work of the Planning team in particular. Several participants noted that being invited to share lived experience—and to have that experience taken seriously—felt meaningful and reflected a genuine commitment to inclusive and community-informed climate planning.

Participants also specifically recognized practices the City is already doing well and encouraged these efforts to continue. This included compensating community members for their time, insight, and lived expertise. Paying participants for their labor and wisdom was viewed as a sign of respect and a tangible demonstration that community input is valued.

At the same time, the cross-cutting themes from Phase 2 focus groups suggest that effective climate policy in Spokane depends not only on the goals the City sets, but on how those goals are designed, communicated, implemented, and sustained over time.

Participants consistently emphasized that climate impacts are already being felt in daily life and are closely tied to housing quality, transportation access, food systems, health, and cost of living. As a result, climate policies that focus narrowly on environmental outcomes without accounting for downstream impacts, maintenance responsibilities, or access barriers risk creating new burdens for residents—particularly those with the least capacity to absorb them.

The themes also highlight that trust in climate policy is shaped less by stated intentions and more by visible follow-through. Policies that rely on vague language, lack clear responsibility, or are not paired with sustained investment and enforcement may undermine confidence, even when the underlying goals are widely supported.

Another key implication is that access to climate programs is uneven. Many residents—especially those who are not already civically engaged—do not know what climate policies or programs exist, whether they qualify, or how to benefit from them. While some participants expressed a preference for clear, official paper communication, it was also acknowledged that no single communication method will meet everyone's needs. Participants emphasized the importance of a layered communication approach that combines official City communication with outreach through trusted community-based organizations.

Participants also discussed what *true partnership* with the City looks like in practice. Partnership was described not simply as providing input, but as being kept informed, seeing how feedback is used, having opportunities to stay involved over time, and collaborating in ways that build shared understanding and trust. This framing reinforces that engagement is not separate from implementation, but a core part of effective climate policy.

Finally, participants expressed interest in future opportunities that support deeper understanding of how City policies work and how they affect daily life. Several discussions pointed toward the value of community-centered spaces where residents could explore what policies actually mean in plain, human language and offer feedback on how policies and programs are explained. This type of engagement was framed as empowering rather than instructional, and as an opportunity to strengthen mutual understanding between the City and community.

Recommendations

Informed by these implications and grounded in participant input, the following recommendations highlight opportunities the City may consider as it advances climate policy development and implementation:

1. **Design policies with full lifecycle responsibility**, accounting for long-term maintenance, affordability, and downstream impacts.
2. **Use clear, action-oriented language** that defines responsibility, timelines, and accountability.
3. **Invest in implementation and long-term follow-through**, pairing policy adoption with sustained funding and enforcement.

4. **Improve public awareness of climate programs and policies**, particularly for residents who are not already civically engaged.
5. **Use a layered communication approach**, recognizing that no single method will meet all needs and combining official City communication with outreach through trusted community-based organizations.
6. **Collaborate with community-based organizations to co-brand and promote policies and programs**, increasing reach, trust, and relevance.
7. **Offer hands-on, practical engagement opportunities** that provide immediate value and skill-building.
8. **Treat community engagement as an ongoing relationship**, rather than a one-time input opportunity.
9. **Continue compensating community members for their time, expertise, and lived experience**, reinforcing respect and equity in engagement.
10. **Explore future engagement opportunities focused on shared understanding of City policies**, including community-informed efforts to explain what policies mean in clear, everyday language and how residents can engage with them.

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Spokane Climate Planning Phase 2 Focus Groups

Focus Group–Specific Insights for Policy Development

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Purpose of This Document

This document provides focus group–specific insights from Phase 2 Climate Planning conversations held in November and December 2025. It is intended to complement the Phase 2 Synthesis Report by preserving the distinct context, emphasis, and policy-relevant nuance of each focus group.

Where the synthesis report answers "What did we hear overall?", this document answers:

- What did each group emphasize, and why?
- How did the conversation unfold within each group?
- How did participants describe a just, safe, and climate-resilient future?
- Which policy design considerations emerged from specific lived experiences?
- How can planners trace themes back to their source conversations when drafting or refining policy language?

Rather than synthesizing across groups, this document intentionally holds the differences—recognizing that climate impacts, priorities, and solutions are shaped by lived experience, role, and context.

Focus Groups Included

- Youth
- Climate Justice

- Food Security
- Barriers to Access

Each section includes:

- Group-specific discussion themes
- Context for why those themes mattered to that group
- Policy design cues embedded in conversation
- Highlighted quotes preserving tone and emphasis

Direct quotes are used selectively. No individual names are included.

Youth Focus Group (11/13/25)

Context and What This Group Centered

This group grounded climate impacts in daily mobility, safety, and the ability to access public space—especially for youth who rely on biking, walking, and buses to get to school and work. The conversation repeatedly returned to a simple idea: climate resilience is not abstract—it shows up in whether young people can move safely, spend time outdoors, and use public spaces without harm or fear.

Youth also surfaced an important planning assumption: many do not attend their neighborhood school (choice schools, transportation constraints), which means climate strategies tied only to "areas around schools" may miss the real travel patterns youth are navigating.

How the Conversation Unfolded

The discussion moved through four linked arcs:

1. **Climate impacts as lived reality** (smoke, heat, flooding, ice)
2. **What matters most right now** (cooling/water, parks safety, bike/walk safety, transit reliability)
3. **What "working well" looks like** (specific improvements, not general aspirations)
4. **What should happen first** (a prioritized set of near-term actions)

This progression produced unusually clear "policy-ready" material: the group naturally translated problems into design requirements (what must be true for a solution to work).

Distinct Themes Raised in Youth (and Why They Matter for Policy)

1) Heat and smoke limit youth freedom and wellbeing

Youth described climate impacts as restricting movement and participation—especially for those with heat sensitivity or health conditions. The result is not only physical risk, but isolation and reduced quality of life.

Participant Quotes:

- "Smoke makes people sick… it just really bums me out."
- "Sometimes it's so hot I can't risk going outside."

Policy relevance: Cooling and hydration access isn't a "nice-to-have." For youth, it is a participation condition—whether they can safely be outdoors at all.

2) Public spaces (parks and hangouts) are treated as infrastructure—and they're failing

Youth framed parks as places they *should* be able to go to cool down, meet friends, and reset. Instead, they described parks as unsafe due to disrepair, cleanliness issues, and harmful activity. Importantly, youth also named a "broken windows" effect: when parks look neglected, people treat them as neglected, creating a cycle.

Policy relevance: Parks are part of a climate resilience system (shade, cooling, water, recovery spaces). If they are unsafe or unusable, they cannot serve that function.

3) Transportation unreliability becomes a climate access barrier

Because many youth depend on buses, climate conditions (snow/ice, delays, breakdowns) become a structural barrier to education and work. Youth spoke in concrete terms about capacity, timing, safety, and maintenance.

Policy relevance: Transit resilience is equity policy. "Climate readiness" needs to include capacity planning, winter reliability, and accurate rider information, not just long-range transportation goals.

4) Maintenance burden and cost-shifting show up as "quiet policy failure"

Youth shared examples where the cost of maintenance or downstream responsibility makes the "right" climate behavior impossible.

Participant Quotes:

- "We cut our tree down because one was dying and going to fall on our house and we can't afford a stump removal." (They also couldn't afford to replace the tree).

Policy relevance: Youth highlighted a classic implementation trap: if maintenance costs fall on households without support, climate investments can reverse (e.g., net loss of tree canopy).

Visioning the Future: "What 'Working Well' Looked Like for Youth"

Note: Unlike other groups, Youth visioning emerged through repeated "perfect world / working well" prompts rather than a single imagine 2046 exercise. Their future picture was highly concrete and systems-focused.

In a climate-ready Spokane, youth described success as:

- **Reliable access to basics in public space:** water, shade, bathrooms that are open/clean/working
- **Visible stewardship that makes parks feel safe and cared for** (staff presence + quick repair/cleanup)
- **Transit that holds up during extreme weather** (capacity, maintenance, winter readiness, accurate real-time info)
- **Safe, continuous routes** (bike/walk networks that don't break mid-route and are maintained year-round)
- **Equity as a design requirement** (resources not concentrated only in high-visibility neighborhoods)

Policy Design Cues Embedded in Youth Discussion

Below are the "drafting cues" that showed up repeatedly in how youth described solutions.

A) Cooling + hydration infrastructure must be reliable and usable

- Place water where people actually are (parks, routes, work sites like tennis instruction)
- Maintain fountains so they work and feel sanitary
- Pair shade with water access (not either/or)

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis): Avoid "encourage." Use standards like "ensure," "maintain," "provide," and specify maintenance responsibility.

B) Parks require visible stewardship, not occasional cleanup

Youth responded strongly to models where staff presence creates safety, relationship, and rapid response. They also identified urgent repair timelines as part of safety.

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis): Policies should include response timelines (repair, cleaning, re-opening bathrooms), not just intentions.

C) Safe routes are continuous routes

Youth emphasized that broken or discontinuous bike networks create risk. They also pointed out that winter plowing often prioritizes cars over bikes, and that hazards on routes accumulate.

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis): Name "continuous networks," "maintenance parity," and "seasonal operations" as requirements.

D) Transit needs climate-specific reliability planning

Youth gave clear "what good looks like": more capacity at peak youth commute hours, safer winter operations, better maintenance, and accurate live tracking.

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis): Frame these as climate resilience measures (not only transportation service improvements).

What Youth Wanted First (Priority Signals for Early Action)

When asked what they'd want to see first, youth clustered around four early-action priorities:

1. **Increased bus capacity during peak commute times** (especially around school/work start/end)
2. **Outreach/resources (not policing) presence in parks** (paired with cleanup and safety)
3. **Equitable distribution of resources across Spokane** (not only high-visibility areas)
4. **More frequent park and playground cleanup/repair**, especially in summer

These priorities reflect an underlying youth logic: fix the systems that determine whether young people can safely exist in public.

Where This Connects to Cross-Cutting Themes

Youth discussion strongly reinforces:

- **Theme 1:** Climate is experienced as daily wellbeing
- **Theme 2:** Policies can shift burden without lifecycle planning
- **Theme 4:** Awareness/trust/access depend on channels and usability
- **Theme 5:** Practical engagement and visible stewardship builds confidence
- **Theme 6:** Youth interest in feedback loops and follow-through was present implicitly (wanting visible action, repair urgency, staff presence)

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Climate Justice Focus Group (11/19/25)

Context and What This Group Centered

The Climate Justice focus group centered climate change as a systems issue—one that intersects with housing, health, labor, immigration, infrastructure, and accountability. Participants consistently emphasized that climate impacts are not evenly distributed and that existing systems often fail to protect those most exposed to harm.

Rather than focusing on individual behaviors, this group repeatedly returned to questions of responsibility: who is protected, who bears the burden, who enforces policy, and who is resourced to adapt. Climate justice, as described by participants, was not about abstract equity goals—it was about whether systems actually work for people when conditions become dangerous.

How the Conversation Unfolded

The discussion followed a clear progression:

1. **Lived impacts and compounding harm** (health, housing, cost, isolation)
2. **Who is most exposed and why** (place, identity, income, status)
3. **System failures and enforcement gaps**
4. **What a climate-just future would feel like**
5. **What policy must do differently to earn trust**

This structure produced strong guidance not only on *what* policy should address, but *how* it must be written, implemented, and sustained.

Distinct Themes Raised in Climate Justice (and Why They Matter for Policy)

1) Climate harm compounds existing health, economic, and social vulnerability

Participants described climate impacts as layering onto already-present inequities: chronic illness, aging infrastructure, rising utility costs, and social isolation. Elders, immunocompromised people, immigrants and refugees, renters, and outdoor workers were repeatedly named as being at heightened risk.

Participant Voice:

- "Even 'young elders' struggle, especially without a network and resource pool."
- "Economically this is top of mind. How expensive utility bills and other bills to meet needs in extreme temperatures."

Policy relevance: Climate strategies must account for cumulative burden. Policies that address heat, smoke, or cold without addressing affordability, access, and support risk excluding those most impacted.

2) Access barriers are structural, not informational

Participants emphasized that posting information online is insufficient. Language access, technology gaps, immigration status, trust, and fear of enforcement all shape whether people can safely access resources.

Participant Voice:

- "I want to hold the paper." (Referring to preference for tangible, official communication)

Policy relevance: Climate communication must be multi-modal, multilingual, and grounded in trusted relationships—not solely web-based or opt-in.

3) Enforcement gaps undermine protection and shift risk to individuals

Participants raised concern that policies often exist without meaningful enforcement, leaving workers and residents to choose between safety and survival.

Participant Voice:

- "Some protective policies are not enforced."
- "Workers often fear job loss if they assert their rights."

Policy relevance: Without enforcement mechanisms, climate protections can unintentionally increase risk for those with the least power to self-advocate.

4) Short-term programs erode trust

The group expressed skepticism toward pilots and initiatives that lack long-term funding or accountability. Many participants referenced past experiences where programs were launched, publicized, and then withdrawn.

> **Policy relevance:** Climate policy must be designed for durability. Time-limited or underfunded initiatives risk reinforcing distrust rather than resilience.

Visioning a Climate-Just Spokane

Participants were invited to imagine Spokane in 2046 if climate justice were truly centered. Their visions emphasized ease, dignity, and shared responsibility rather than complexity or individual burden.

In a climate-just Spokane:

- **Daily life feels easier and safer**
  - Clean air, safe water, and reliable transportation are baseline expectations
  - Homes are built or retrofitted to maintain safe temperatures year-round
  - Utility costs are predictable and affordable
- **Systems are designed to include everyone**
  - Language and technology are not barriers to accessing services
  - Information is clear, human, and accessible
  - Immigration status does not determine safety or eligibility for help
- **Responsibility is clearly held**
  - Policies specify who maintains infrastructure (trees, cooling, housing upgrades)
  - Large polluters are held accountable and contribute to solutions
  - Upfront costs are not shifted onto households least able to pay
- **Community partnership is real, not symbolic**
  - Impacted communities are involved from design through implementation
  - Relationships are built over time, not only during outreach phases
  - Community members are compensated for their labor and expertise

- **Land, water, and labor are stewarded**
    - Tribal leadership and land stewardship practices are integrated
    - Green jobs support both climate resilience and economic stability
    - Restoration and care of land and waterways are ongoing commitments

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis)

The following drafting cues reflect how participants described *what must be true* for policy to work. These are **consultant-derived synthesis**, not participant language.

A) Move from aspiration to obligation

- Avoid "encourage," "consider," or "explore"
- Use "ensure," "require," "fund," and "maintain"
- Define who is responsible for implementation and upkeep

B) Build enforcement and accountability into policy

- Specify enforcement mechanisms and reporting
- Protect workers from retaliation
- Include measurable outcomes and transparency

C) Fund sustainability upfront

- Design policies to operate over multiple years
- Avoid pilots without continuation plans
- Align funding with the full lifespan of infrastructure or programs

D) Remove upfront cost barriers

- Avoid rebate-only models that require households to front costs
- Prioritize grant-based or fully subsidized approaches
- Use fines or fees from major polluters to support access

E) Treat partnership as a process, not a moment

- Involve communities throughout implementation

- Track and share progress publicly
- Compensate community expertise consistently

Where This Connects to Cross-Cutting Themes

Climate Justice discussion strongly reinforces:

- **Theme 1:** Climate is experienced as daily wellbeing
- **Theme 2:** Policies can shift burden without lifecycle planning
- **Theme 3:** Climate impacts compound existing inequities
- **Theme 4:** Access depends on trust, language, and communication channels
- **Theme 6:** Ongoing engagement is part of climate justice
- **Theme 7:** Policy effectiveness depends on clarity, accountability, and follow-through

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Food Security Focus Group (12/2/25)

Context and What This Group Centered

This group grounded climate impacts in how people get, grow, afford, and access food under increasing climate stress. Participants consistently framed food security as inseparable from housing costs, transportation, health, and land use—and emphasized that climate change is already disrupting food systems in concrete, everyday ways.

The conversation repeatedly returned to one core idea: Spokane produces food, but its systems are not currently designed to feed Spokane equitably or resiliently under climate pressure. Participants emphasized that food security is not a niche issue or a set of disconnected programs, but a systems challenge involving land stewardship, infrastructure, coordination, and long-term investment.

How the Conversation Unfolded

The discussion followed a clear progression:

1. **Climate impacts on daily food access** (heat, drought, smoke, cost, transportation)
2. **Who is most impacted and why** (elders, renters, single adults, families, people with health or dietary needs)
3. **Structural gaps in current systems** (local production, procurement, storage, coordination)
4. **A shared vision of a climate-resilient food system** grounded in local production, community access, and dignity
5. **What the City must do differently** to move from fragmented efforts to system solutions

This arc produced policy-relevant insights about infrastructure, governance, and implementation, not just food programs.

Distinct Themes Raised in Food Security (and Why They Matter for Policy)

1) Climate change is already reshaping food access and affordability

Participants described how hotter summers and drought shorten the shelf life of produce, make growing food more difficult, and increase costs—especially for fresh fruits and vegetables. These impacts were not described as future risks, but as current disruptions affecting purchasing decisions, nutrition, and household stress.

Participant Voice:

- "Vegetables don't last as long after you buy them."
- "Fruit stands don't last as long when it's hot."

Policy relevance: Climate-resilient food planning must account for availability, affordability, and freshness, not just access points.

2) Food insecurity is inseparable from housing, transportation, and health

Participants emphasized that food decisions are shaped by rent, work schedules, transportation limits, and health needs. Even when food programs exist, climate conditions (heat, smoke) and transit barriers can make them inaccessible.

Participant Voice:

- "Single women are losing their houses because rent has increased… Decision between food or rent."
- "People are juggling a lot of things."

Policy relevance: Food access cannot be addressed in isolation. Climate strategies related to food must align with **transportation planning, housing stability, and public health**.

3) Spokane grows food—but its systems are not designed to feed Spokane

A strong theme emerged around **local production versus local access**. Participants noted that while the region grows significant food, only a small portion feeds local residents. Reliance on imported food was framed as a climate and supply-chain vulnerability.

Policy relevance: Treating food systems as regional infrastructure—including land protection, local procurement, and distribution—strengthens climate resilience and economic stability.

4) Transportation and distribution are hidden barriers to food access

Participants highlighted the difficulty of carrying food on buses, traveling in extreme heat, and reaching farmers markets or food banks—especially for elders, people with disabilities, and families.

Policy relevance: Food security strategies must consider **how people physically access food**, particularly during climate stress events. Transportation coordination is a climate equity issue.

5) Coordination gaps limit the impact of existing food efforts

Participants pointed to the presence of strong programs and organizations, while also noting that **efforts are fragmented and under-resourced**. The lack of dedicated coordination capacity was identified as a barrier to sustained progress.

Policy relevance: Effective food system resilience requires clear stewardship, staffing, and long-term coordination, not just pilot programs.

6) Equity and dignity must be central to climate-resilient food systems

Participants emphasized that climate-driven food insecurity disproportionately affects elders who do not qualify for assistance, single adults, families, people with health or dietary restrictions, and those experiencing displacement. They also named the importance of culturally relevant foods and land stewardship.

Participant Voice:

- "Nothing about us, without us."

Policy relevance: Climate food strategies must prioritize equity, dignity, and inclusion, ensuring benefits reach those most impacted.

Visioning a Climate-Resilient and Food-Secure Spokane

As part of the Food Security focus group, participants were invited to imagine Spokane in the year 2046—a future in which the city has adapted to climate change in ways that support every household's ability to access healthy, affordable food, even during heat waves, smoke events, and periods of rising costs.

Participants described a future that felt sensory, relational, and grounded in everyday life:

- **Food is visible, fresh, and woven into daily experience**
  - The city *smells* fresh
  - Children run through parks picking apples and fruit directly from trees
  - Fresh fruit and vegetable stands and small carts appear throughout neighborhoods
  - Whole, uncut produce is available in shared public spaces
- **Food brings people together**
  - Community potlucks are common
  - People cook and share food grown by neighbors

  - Food is a central way people connect, care for one another, and build community

- **Food education starts early and is normalized**
  - Children learn in school where food comes from
  - Youth learn how to grow, cook, preserve, and reduce food waste
  - Nutrition and food knowledge are treated as life skills, not special programs
- **Food systems are hyper-local and neighborhood-based**
  - Community gardens exist in every neighborhood
  - Both shared and individual gardens are supported, including for people in all housing types
  - Some residents garden on behalf of elders or neighbors who cannot garden themselves
  - Food security networks exist across neighborhoods rather than being centralized
- **The City actively supports growers and land stewardship**
  - Growers are given access to land
  - Zoning protects agricultural land from being easily converted to other uses
  - Tax incentives support small and local farmers
  - New developments include rooftop gardens, orchards, and food-producing spaces
  - Public open spaces include food and water access
- **Equity and justice are foundational**
  - Land back and land stewardship opportunities are available for Indigenous communities and Black farmers
  - Culturally relevant foods are supported and visible
  - Transparency exists around where food comes from, its nutritional value, and how land is stewarded

- **Food is treated as part of the health system**
    - Food is understood as medicine
    - Healthcare systems prescribe fruits and vegetables
    - Medicaid and Medicare support access to fresh, local food
    - Health systems partner directly with local growers
- **Systems account for affordability and stability**
    - People can afford their rent and basic needs
    - Food access does not require navigating excessive bureaucracy
    - Climate adaptation reduces stress rather than adding new burdens

Across these visions, participants emphasized that a climate-resilient food future depends on systems-level support, visible infrastructure, and shared responsibility, with the City playing a central role in stewarding land, convening partners, and sustaining long-term investment.

Policy Design Cues Embedded in Food Security Discussion

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis)
The following cues reflect consultant interpretation of participant input and are intended to support policy drafting—not to attribute specific recommendations to participants.

A) Treat food systems as climate infrastructure

- Frame food access, storage, and distribution as essential resilience infrastructure
- Align food policy with climate, transportation, and land-use planning

B) Use procurement as a climate resilience lever

- Incentivize or prioritize local procurement by hospitals, schools, and City-supported institutions
- Support local farmers through predictable demand and climate-aligned purchasing

C) Address transportation as a food access issue

- Coordinate food access planning with transit agencies
- Consider climate-responsive transportation supports during heat and smoke events

D) Invest in coordination and stewardship

- Support dedicated staffing or facilitation for food system coordination
- Reduce diffuse responsibility by clarifying City roles and partnerships

E) Center dignity and equity

- Ensure food access strategies serve elders, renters, families, and people with health or dietary needs
- Support culturally relevant foods and community-led solutions

What Participants Emphasized Most Clearly

When asked what the City should hear most clearly, participants emphasized:

- The need for system solutions, not isolated programs
- The City's role as a steward of land and infrastructure
- Continued, funded engagement with community members
- Clear accountability and follow-through

Participant Voice:

- "Nothing about us, without us."

Where This Connects to Cross-Cutting Themes

The Food Security focus group strongly reinforces:

- **Theme 1:** Climate is experienced as daily wellbeing
- **Theme 2:** Policies can shift burden without lifecycle planning
- **Theme 3:** Climate impacts compound existing inequities
- **Theme 4:** Access depends on awareness, trust, and usable systems
- **Theme 6:** Ongoing engagement is part of climate justice

- **Theme 7:** Effective policy requires clarity, accountability, and sustained investment

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Barriers to Access / Under-Resourced Focus Group (12/3/25)

Context and What This Group Centered

This focus group centered climate change as a pressure multiplier on already stretched lives. Participants did not talk about climate impacts as isolated events, but as something that intensifies financial strain, housing insecurity, health risks, and social isolation—especially for people living paycheck to paycheck or in older housing stock.

A defining feature of this conversation was credibility and trust. Participants repeatedly emphasized that access to resources is shaped not just by whether programs exist, but by whether people recognize information as legitimate, understandable, and meant for them.

How the Conversation Unfolded

The conversation moved through five connected arcs:

1. **Daily climate stressors** (smoke, heat, cold, cost volatility)
2. **Housing and utility fragility** (older homes, extreme bills, coping behaviors)
3. **Information overload vs. trusted communication**
4. **What "life getting easier" would actually look like**
5. **Practical supports that help people prepare—not just react**

Rather than abstract policy discussions, participants focused on how climate change shows up in routines, finances, and decisions, and what would meaningfully reduce stress and risk.

Distinct Themes Raised in Barriers to Access (and Why They Matter for Policy)

1) Climate impacts are felt as financial instability and constant adaptation

Participants described climate impacts through coping strategies: space heaters in every room, shutting off parts of the house, avoiding outdoor activity, and constantly adjusting to extreme swings in temperature and air quality.

Participant Voice:

- "There are space heaters in every room in old house."
- "What used to be… I grew up in Spokane—we didn't have a smoke season."

Policy relevance: Climate resilience for under-resourced households is inseparable from affordability, predictability, and housing quality. Policies that assume households can absorb cost shocks or make upgrades independently miss lived reality.

2) Older housing stock magnifies climate harm

Participants repeatedly referenced homes built in the early 1900s, failing furnaces, poor insulation, and outdated systems. These conditions make extreme heat and cold more dangerous and more expensive.

Policy relevance: Housing age and condition should be treated as climate risk factors. Climate planning that does not address older housing stock will continue to leave residents vulnerable.

3) Information exists, but credibility and clarity are the barrier

Participants acknowledged that resources and programs exist—but emphasized that many people do not trust, recognize, or understand them. Digital-only communication was described as overwhelming and easy to dismiss.

Participant Voice:

- "If it's the City of Spokane… it's like, oh, I should probably open this."

Policy relevance: Access depends on how information arrives, not just what it says. Official, tangible communication builds trust, especially when paired with clear eligibility and human contact points.

4) Preparation matters more than emergency response

Participants expressed a strong desire for tools, information, and support that help people prepare for climate impacts ahead of time—rather than scrambling during heat waves, smoke events, or cold snaps.

> **Policy relevance:** Proactive supports (home readiness, weather education, clear planning guidance) reduce harm more effectively than reactive systems alone.

Visioning the Future: "When Life Got Easier"

Participants were invited to imagine a future where climate adaptation actually reduced stress and expanded possibility. Their visions emphasized stability, freedom, and forward-looking security.

In a climate-adapted Spokane:

- **Daily life is more affordable and predictable**
  - Utilities are affordable and stable
  - Grocery prices are manageable
  - Extreme weather does not create financial crisis
- **People can move freely and safely**
  - Transit is reliable and efficient
  - Bus stops provide shelter from rain, heat, and cold
  - Walking feels safe, even in traffic or extreme weather
- **Time and energy are no longer consumed by survival**
  - People can say "yes" to social activities
  - Families can plan for the future instead of living paycheck to paycheck
  - Stress and constant tradeoffs are reduced
- **Long-term goals become possible**
  - Saving for education and retirement is realistic
  - Building generational stability feels attainable
  - Families can invest in their children's futures

Written Survey Response (Vision of the Future):

- "Have money saved for my kids future college. Get a Masters degree in Business Admin. and finish Pharmacy Degree."

Why this matters: Participants framed climate resilience not only as safety, but as the ability to plan, invest, and imagine a future beyond immediate survival.

Drafting Cues for Policy Consideration (Consultant Synthesis)

The following cues reflect patterns in how participants described what would actually help. These are consultant-derived insights, not participant language.

A) Treat affordability as a climate outcome

- Name utility stability and housing costs as climate resilience issues
- Avoid assuming households can front costs or manage volatility

B) Address older housing directly

- Include insulation, HVAC, and window upgrades as climate strategies
- Pair standards with enforcement and support for renters

C) Use trusted, tangible communication

- Combine mailed materials with digital options
- Clearly state eligibility and next steps
- Include contact information for questions and feedback

D) Prioritize preparation over reaction

- Provide seasonal readiness guidance
- Normalize climate education for newcomers and long-term residents
- Support libraries and community spaces as access points

E) Pair information with relationship

- Offer workshops that combine learning with community-building
- Create low-pressure entry points for engagement (e.g., practical skill sessions)

What Participants Wanted the City to Know

Participants closed by explicitly naming appreciation for the City's efforts and progress:

- They see improvement and acknowledge investment over time
- They value continued outreach and inclusion
- They want the City to keep expanding who is reached and how

This feedback underscores that trust already exists—and can be strengthened through clarity, consistency, and follow-through.

Where This Connects to Cross-Cutting Themes

Barriers to Access discussion strongly reinforces:

- **Theme 1:** Climate is experienced as daily wellbeing
- **Theme 2:** Policies can shift burden without lifecycle planning
- **Theme 3:** Climate impacts compound existing inequities
- **Theme 4:** Access depends on awareness, trust, and communication channels
- **Theme 5:** Practical, hands-on engagement builds confidence
- **Theme 6:** Ongoing engagement strengthens trust and effectiveness

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Closing: The Spokane People Were Describing

Across Phase 2, participants weren't only naming what feels broken—they were describing what a thriving Spokane could look like if climate adaptation actually reduced harm and expanded possibility.

They envisioned a city where:

- **Young people can move safely and freely**
  Bike routes don't disappear, buses function during extreme weather, and parks feel cared for, safe, and welcoming.

- **Climate justice is visible in daily life**
  Language and technology are not barriers, frontline communities are involved from design through implementation, large polluters are held accountable, and policies are meaningfully enforced.
- **Food is local, affordable, and relational**
  Gardens and fruit stands are a normal part of neighborhoods, schools teach food skills, land is actively stewarded, and food is treated as medicine rather than a luxury.
- **Under-resourced households can plan for the future—not just survive**
  Utility costs are stable, homes are livable, information is trustworthy and easy to act on, and long-term goals like education, retirement, and generational stability feel attainable.

This document is designed to keep those visions—and the lived logic behind them—close to the drafting table. The *drafting cues* included throughout are consultant synthesis intended to support policy clarity and implementation readiness, while the group-specific themes and participant excerpts preserve traceability back to community voice.

Ultimately, participants described climate readiness as a city where systems work when conditions are hardest—and where the burden of resilience is not shifted onto those with the fewest resources.