

## First Things First Okanagan

### Okanagan Capacity Upgrade Project: Intervener status application

#### 1. Please state your reasons for intervening in this proceeding.

- The project is within the region served by our organization. Members of our society have brought the Fortis Capacity Upgrade project to our attention as an issue of concern because of local environmental and climate impacts.
- Expanding the capacity of natural gas in the Okanagan runs counter to the explicit goals of the City of Penticton, City of Kelowna, and Regional District Community Climate Action Plans. Residential and commercial buildings are the second biggest source of GHG emissions accounting for 30% of Penticton's emissions<sup>1</sup> and 23% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the region.<sup>2</sup> The City of Penticton's climate goal is to reduce emissions below 2007 levels by at least 40% by 2030, 65% by 2040, and 100% by 2050, creating energy efficient buildings powered, heated and cooled with 100% renewable energy. Natural gas infrastructure expansion runs counter to these climate targets.

#### **Decision in this matter; or describe your experience, information, or expertise relevant to this matter that would contribute to the BCUC's decision making.**

First Things First Okanagan is deeply invested in helping the region's residents meet the climate challenge. Since the Society's inception, we have sponsored educational seminars, conferences and expositions to educate the public and give them tools to lower household emissions. Our organization has been approached to advocate for local residents who will be impacted by the Fortis project.

Members of our board have working backgrounds in environmental science, biology, law, health, government, and education. Three members of the board live near the proposed Fortis capacity upgrade route.

Our organization sits on the City of Penticton's Sustainability Committee which to help support and implement the City's Climate Action Plan. The Okanagan Capacity Upgrade Project runs

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<sup>1</sup> City of Penticton Community Climate Action Plan

<sup>2</sup> RDOS Community Climate Action Plan. P.4

counter to citizen and government efforts to reduce carbon emissions from heating buildings, which is the second largest contributor to municipal and regional carbon emissions.

## **2. Please list the key issues you intend to address in the proceeding.**

### **1) The Capacity Upgrade Project will make it difficult to meet emission reduction targets. CleanBC advocates a Net Zero energy future with little or no dependence on fossil fuels for home energy use.**

Reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 is the goal of the Paris Agreement on climate change and both Canada and British Columbia have committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. Since space and water heating represent about 85 per cent of residential greenhouse gas emissions and 68 per cent of commercial emissions, many jurisdictions in North America and Europe are restricting or banning fossil fuel-based heating in new home construction and replacing fossil fuel burning with electric heating to meet these targets.

A 2021 report from the Canadian Institute for Climate Choices states that modelling consistently shows "electrification of heating as a necessary part of the transition to net zero in Canada's building sector."<sup>3</sup> Allowing increased fossil fuel infrastructure will make it more difficult to reduce the region's reliance on fossil fuel energy.

### **2) The Capacity Upgrade Project would continue the use of methane whereas Canada and B.C. have pledged to cut methane emissions. Also, methane-fueled home appliances are implicated in lower indoor air quality.**

During the 2021 UN COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Canada and more than 80 other countries signed a Global Methane Pledge to cut emissions of methane by at least 30 per cent below 2020 levels by 2030. Methane is the main component of natural gas and provides 52% of the energy used to heat Canadian homes. Fugitive emissions from the natural gas industry's production, distribution, storage as well as leaks and incomplete combustion in stoves and furnaces, are a significant source of methane emissions. As well, natural gas appliances have been implicated in exposing people to respiratory disease-triggering pollutants that lower indoor air quality.

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Institute for Climate Choices

**3) Projections for regional growth do not require the growth of natural gas infrastructure when the supply of non-emitting energy is already available for home heating.**

Since natural gas is the source of approximately 92% of building emissions (City of Penticton Climate Action Plan. p. 21), restricting its use in new buildings is an important approach to lower community emissions. Home energy retrofit initiatives have the potential to shrink demand for natural gas.

**4) Expanding the capacity of natural gas in the south Okanagan runs counter to the explicit goals of the City of Penticton and RDOS Community Climate Action Plans. The Fortis project would dampen demand for electrical energy retrofits to install appliances proven to lower household emissions.**

Since furnaces and gas appliances are built to last twenty years or more, installing new fossil fuel home heating infrastructure will deter homeowners from switching to emissions-free options that would help meet climate emission targets.

The project is not needed, cannot ensure that GHG emissions will be reduced, and exposes a 30 km environmentally sensitive corridor to potential habitat degradation. If local government Climate Action Plan retrofit initiatives are implemented to reduce fossil fuel use, the demand for natural gas may not rise and may even shrink in the long term.

Fortis customers may also pay increased rates to subsidize expansion of infrastructure and development of renewable natural gas sources.

**5) CleanBC advocates a Net Zero energy future with little or no dependence on fossil fuels for home energy use.**

BCUC seeks to ensure that BC residents have access to safe, reliable energy. We believe that by increasing fossil fuel demand and energy infrastructure our province's outlook for a safe and secure future is diminished.

**3. Do you intend to participate fully, including attendance at hearings and submission of evidence or information requests, if applicable?**

We will likely attend some hearings and submit a brief on the capacity upgrade project. We will likely also have some information requests.

**4. Do you intend to request Participant Assistance/Cost Awards funding? This does not impact your ability to participate.**

No.

**Persons requesting intervener status who are organizations, must also submit a description of the organization's mandate and objectives.**

First Things First Okanagan was established as a non-profit society in 2014. The mission of First Things First Okanagan is to promote awareness of climate change and work to find solutions for a better future.

Our constitution and bylaws state that the purposes of the Society are:

- (a) To educate people about the impact of climate change;
- (b) To advocate for action to mitigate and reverse global warming;
- (c) To encourage individuals to take action on climate change.

**Our strategic purposes and activities are to:**

Goal 1: Inform Okanagan communities about the consequences of climate change and inspire them to take action.

Goal 2: Lobby representatives from all levels of government to support policies that reverse the build-up of greenhouse gases.

Goal 3: Inspire individuals and communities to reduce their GHG footprint.

Goal 4: Network with other regional organizations to strengthen climate change awareness and stimulate effective action.

**Membership processes and constituency**

Paid memberships are due and renewed in each calendar year. From eight to ten members form the board of directors, approved at the Annual General Meeting. Currently, FTFO has 75 members and sends a monthly newsletter to 678 subscribers.