

So, we've declared a climate
emergency...now what?

PRAGMA Conference, Spring 2022

Carrie Mitchell, PhD

Associate Professor, School of Planning, University of Waterloo



Local News



Climate change: Councillors scrap \$212M Wonderland Road widening

Megan Stacey

Sep 14, 2021 • September 14, 2021 • 2 minute read •  48 Comments



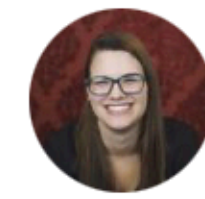
Wonderland Road. (Derek Ruttan/The London Free Press file photo)



Londoners fill the gallery of council chambers, awaiting a vote from councillors that will decide whether or not London declares a climate emergency. **Andrew Graham / 980 CFPL**

The city of London, Ont. has declared a climate emergency

In front of a packed gallery, city councillors voted 12-3 to declare a climate emergency on Tuesday. The vote sees London join ranks with Halifax, Kingston, Vancouver and a growing number of municipalities across Canada that have made similar declarations.



Megan Stacey
@MeganatLFPpress



And council votes 9-5 to halt plans for Wonderland Road widening.
Here's how your councillor voted:
[#LdnOnt](#)

London		
(2.14) Outcome of Climate Lens Screening Applied to Major Transportation Projects		
Motion Passed - (9 - 5 - 0)		
Yes (9)		
A. Hopkins	E. Pelozo	J. Helmer
J. Morgan	M. Cassidy	M. Salih
Mayor E. Holder	S. Lewis	S. Turner
No (5)		
M. van Holst	P. Squire	P. Van Meerbergen
S. Hillier	S. Lehman	
Abstain		
Absent (1)		
None		
A. Kayabaga		

6:09 PM · Sep 14, 2021 · TweetDeck

So, we've declared a
climate emergency...
now what?

Implications for practice...and
humanity.



© picture-alliance/Pacific Press/E. McGregor
<https://www.dw.com/en/climate-emergency-new-hope-or-just-empty-words/a-49523833>

What's in a word...the framing and reframing of climate discourse

Climate change discourse framing

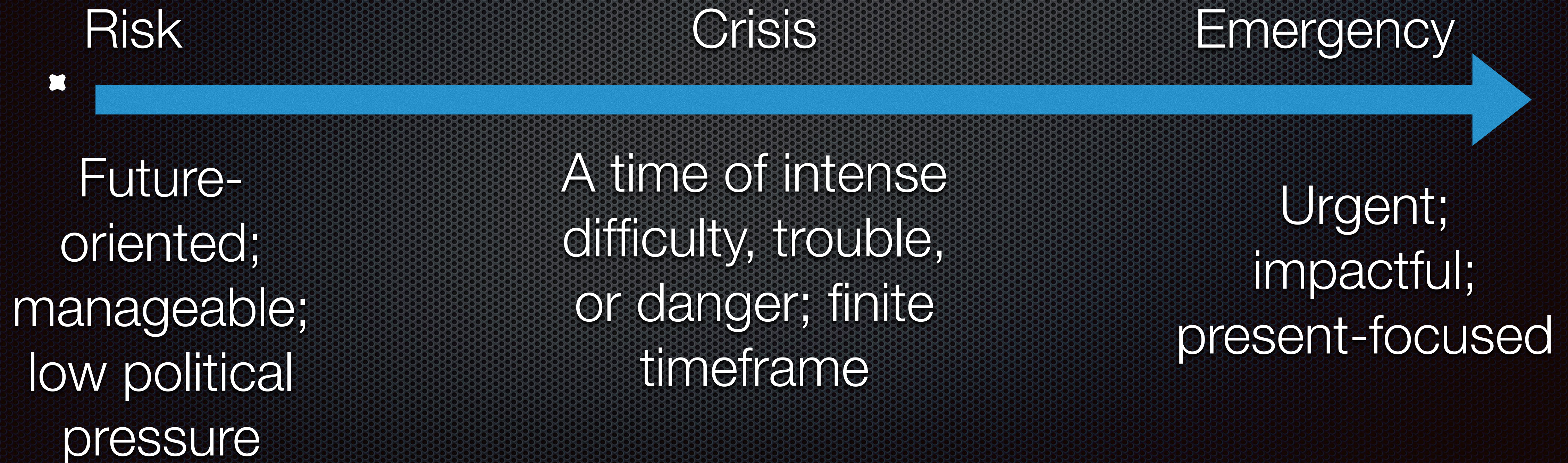
Risk

Crisis

Emergency



Climate change discourse framing



What's in a word...

“climate emergency”

- ✦ It wasn't until 2016 that “climate emergency” first came to be used in mainstream media outlets.
- ✦ The Oxford Dictionary declared “climate emergency” **Word of the Year** for 2019 and defines it as “a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019).

What is a “climate emergency declaration” (CED)?

FREEDOM
Pour nos ENFANTS
TABARQUETTE



TRUDEAU
DOES NOT
CARE ABOUT US

TRUDEAU
FOR
TREASON

THANK YOU
TRUCKERS!

MANDATE
FREEDOM



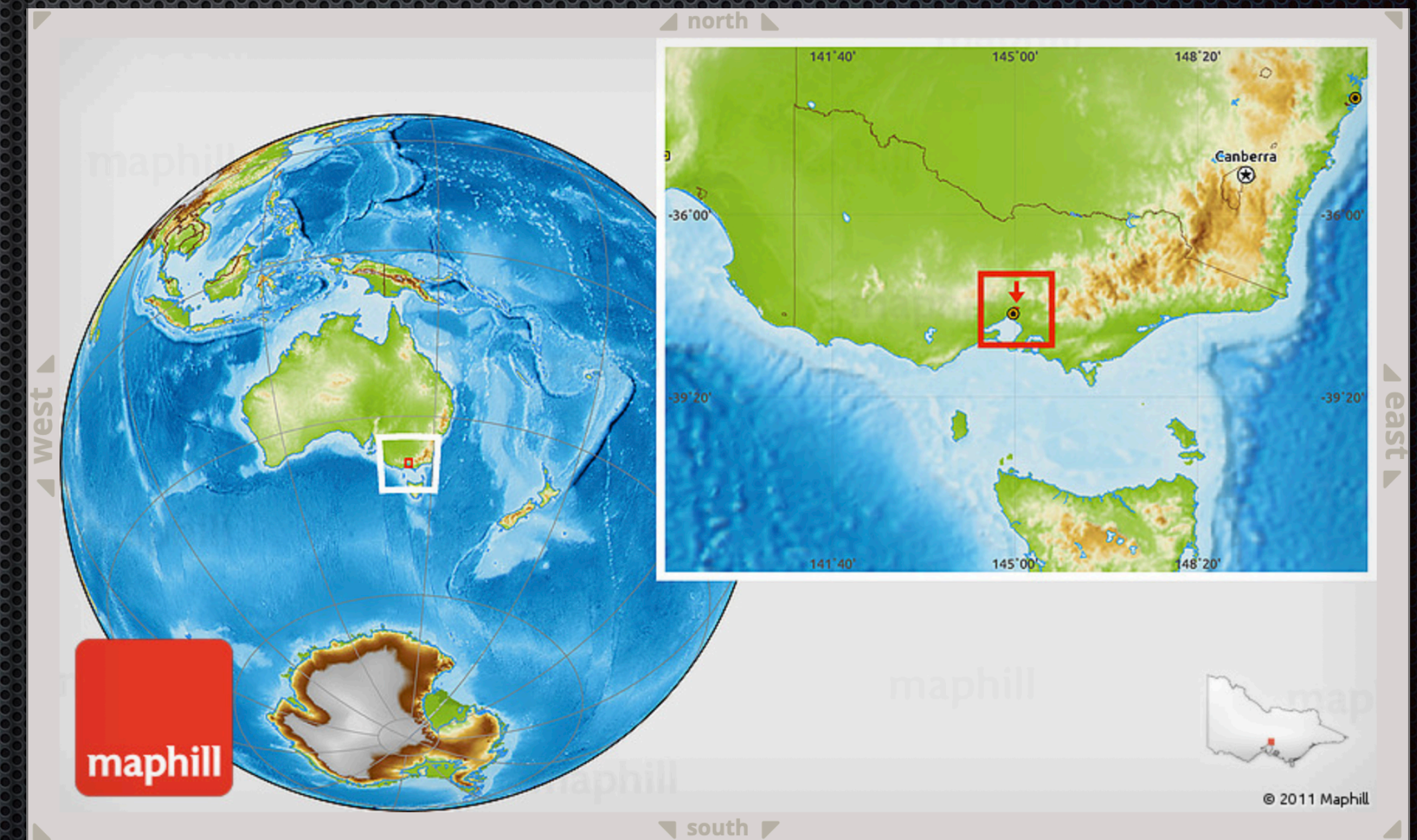
What is a CED?

- ❖ Motion passed by council that acknowledges the seriousness of the climate crisis.
- ❖ Most motions contain a problem statement, but often no concrete plans for action.
- ❖ In the UK, only 62% of local authorities had followed up on their declarations with a new or revised Climate Action Plan.



Where did this all begin?

- ✦ First climate emergency declared in 2016 in Darebin, Australia
- ✦ First climate emergency declaration in UK was Bristol in 2018
- ✦ UK Parliament declared climate emergency in May, 2019



Canada's national climate emergency declaration (CED)

- ✦ Canadian Parliament declared climate emergency June 17, 2019
- ✦ Motion passed with 186 votes to 63.



CEDs in Canada municipalities

- ❖ Vancouver, British Columbia (January 26, 2019)
- ❖ Kingston, Ontario (March 6, 2019)
- ❖ 642 municipalities across Canada have declared a climate emergency (Random Acts of Green, January 18, 2022)



Considerations

- How are Canadian municipalities operationalizing their climate emergency declarations?



Megan Stacey
@MeganatLFPpress



And council votes 9-5 to halt plans for Wonderland Road widening.

Here's how your councillor voted:

[#LdnOnt](#)

(2.14) Outcome of Climate Lens Screening Applied to Major Transportation Projects

Motion Passed - (9 - 5 - 0)

A. Hopkins	E. Pelozo	Yes (9)
J. Morgan	M. Cassidy	J. Helmer
Mayor E. Holder	S. Lewis	M. Salih
		S. Turner
		No (5)
M. van Holst	P. Squire	P. Van Meerbergen
S. Hillier	S. Lehman	
		Abstain
None		
A. Kayabaga		Absent (1)

6:09 PM · Sep 14, 2021 · TweetDeck

Considerations

- Have municipal climate emergency declarations impacted other urban actors?



Considerations

- Placebo politics?
- Placebo responses a less risky means of doing something to avoid policy traps (McConnell, 2020).







Considerations

- ✦ How does the climate emergency intersect with other emergencies (health; war; inequality)?



Summary

- Climate framing has shifted in recent years from future risk to current crisis; this has helped catalyze the trend to declare climate emergencies in cities and regions around the world.
- Climate emergency declarations are statements adopted by city councils intended to catalyze climate action (although not always effective).
- We need to examine the impacts of these declarations for policy, planning, and people.