

The Urgent Matters: How Cities Are Responding to Homelessness, Climate Change and More

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Abstract:

This article takes a deep dive into how different cities throughout the United States and the world deal with some of the most polarizing issues of today, such as climate change, homelessness, and the question of affordable housing. Through breakdowns of strategies, plans, and promises, the article hopes to see what the future holds or needs to look like for cities ranging from the deserts of Phoenix, Arizona to the urban buzz of Los Angeles, California or the swamps of New Orleans, Louisiana, even taking a look at the international cities of Toronto, Canada and London, United Kingdom. After careful consideration of the multitude of plans that cities seem to have come up with, the article finishes with a discussion of what cities seem to have done well and how they accomplished their success, as well as a conclusion consisting of some interesting patterns that the author noticed during his readings.

Keywords: Environment, Homelessness, Climate Change, Marginalized Communities

Introduction:

Homelessness has been an issue both in the United States and globally for as long as time, and unfortunately, those experiencing homelessness often get hit the hardest by the effects of climate change. Being someone experiencing homelessness can mean being put at higher risk for severe impacts from extreme temperatures, natural disasters, lack of clean water, and air pollution. They also may be more vulnerable to disease, especially with poor access to health care. According to a USA Facts website [\[1\]](#), the Department of Housing and Urban Development, or

HUD, reported around 582,000 people experiencing homelessness in the United States alone. This population includes people identifying Pacific Islanders and Black suffering the most per 10,000 people of that race. Why is that? Well, homelessness correlated relatively directly to the amount of money spent on welfare, education, health, and most importantly, housing. Areas such as Hawaii suffer from having some of the most unaffordable housing in the nation, while discriminatory government policies such as redlining and lack of government funding cause areas with mostly or all black populations to suffer

disproportionate impacts with regards to homelessness. Other policy issues around homelessness are that the government hasn't completely ended chronic homelessness or prevented homelessness for people at risk, and more affordable houses are more likely to be in areas more prone to be destroyed by natural disasters or affected by climate change. Climate change is increasing the risk of homelessness for people living in these areas, and thus increasing the risk of serious harm to the health of those people. This, as a whole, is an environmental justice issue, and cities both in the United States and globally have to step up and fix it with the implementation of various plans.

Cities around the world have decided to enact many plans dealing with different issues related to climate change and environmental justice. Looking deeper into these plans on homelessness, economic inequality, and extreme weather, it was apparent that different cities had varying approaches, focuses, perspectives, and solutions. The cities selected for this research included cities in the United States: Washington, DC; Denver, Colorado; Phoenix, Arizona; Los Angeles, California; and New Orleans, Louisiana; as well as cities and countries from outside it: Toronto, Canada; and London, United Kingdom. I chose the majority of these cities mainly because I was already aware of certain specific issues occurring in these cities and wanted to see the plans that the state had come up with in response to these issues, while a few of them were simply cities for whom I wanted to get a more general sense of what kinds of issues and plans were happening. In terms of the actual research, I looked online for plans regarding low-income populations, homelessness, natural disasters, extreme temperatures, and affordable housing by city, and the following table is a summary of what I found:

City	Plan for Low Income Populations	Plan for Homelessness	Plan for Natural Disasters	Plan for Extreme Heat or Cold	Plan for Affordable Housing
DC	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Denver	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Phoenix	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green
Los Angeles	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green
New Orleans	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Toronto	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
London	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green

Of course, this table only shows a general idea of how each plan looked for each city, and in order to make this table, I had to delve a little deeper into the individual plans and responses and break them all down.

Washington, DC:

Issues: As a DC resident, I personally know that both affordable housing and extreme heat are issues that are prevalent in DC, especially with communities of color who make up the vast majority of the eastern side of the city.

Plan: DC published a full climate action and energy plan in August 2018 titled “Clean Energy DC” [2].

Marginalized Communities: In it, the disproportionate impact and inequalities suffered by minorities and marginalized communities are noted: in Section 3.3, Equity and Climate Action, it explains that “[cities like Portland, Seattle, and Cleveland] have included and engaged with at-risk communities that may disproportionately bear the burden of climate change

impacts, and that may be negatively impacted by mitigation actions. Such robust stakeholder engagement is essential.” It then follows it up with Section 3.4 Addressing Equity in Clean Energy DC, where it discusses actions dealing with possible risks to equity that were identified after analyses by the Clean Energy DC team. These include “pay[ing] special attention to include LMI communities by engaging with relevant community organizations” where LMI communities refer to communities of low to moderate income and “reach[ing] out to LMI communities in partnership with local, trusted community organizations” as well as “promot[ing] ‘green job’ opportunities to LMI communities.”

Homelessness: As for the issue of homelessness, although the Clean Energy DC plan does not mention any ways to mitigate the climate change impact suffered by people experiencing homelessness in DC, the district does have a separate plan to solve the homelessness problem: the Homeward 2.0 Plan [3], released in 2021 and aiming to continue the efforts of the first Homeward DC plan started in 2015. The plan holds twelve different goals in order to decrease the amount of people experiencing homelessness in DC, including but not limited to: “Increase Speed and Efficiency of Housing Lease-Up Process,” “Continue Family System Reforms,” “Improve Access to Care for Individuals with Complex Health Needs,” and “Provide Leadership on Creating a Right to Housing in the United States.” These goals, combined with other strategies and set budgets, lead to a very concrete homelessness plan for DC.

Affordable Housing: DC already has a very well developed affordable housing infrastructure in place, even including a website that allows people seeking affordable housing to locate ones near them. The Clean Energy DC plan builds further on this infrastructure by making sure that affordable housing developments and communities will not cause further

climate damage, with many inclusions of affordable housing communities in the previously mentioned mitigation actions, such as “develop[ing] and implement[ing] a specialized engagement strategy to educate and inform LMI, social, and affordable housing communities on building energy performance data,” “consider[ing] offering financial incentives to building owners to support compliance, with advanced funding given to owners of affordable housing developments,” and “explor[ing] options to include the affordable housing community in providing input to decisions made by the Green Bank.” Overall, the plan shows many efforts to incorporate affordable housing in its net-zero energy goals.

Natural Disasters: Though the Clean Energy DC plan does not talk about natural disasters as a whole generally, it does mention some extreme weather events in its text, such as floods and extreme storms. It talks about “climate justice” and equity and says that “governments are beginning to formally consider equity in such plans out of a recognition and acknowledgement that extreme climate events such as floods, fires, and severe storms disproportionately impact some communities more than others. Though climate change is a global and societal challenge, some groups of people shoulder its burden more heavily than others.” The plan takes into account how extreme weather can disproportionately affect marginalized communities in its strategies and efforts, which overall is a positive sight.

Extreme Heat: For extreme temperatures, DC published an individual companion plan to Clean Energy DC Plan named the Climate Ready DC plan [4] in which DC’s plans to “adapt to a changing climate” are detailed, including rising temperatures, increased rainfall and flooding, and increasing sea levels. In this plan, they do also take into account the potential disproportionate impacts: “Climate change will not affect everyone equally. Individuals who are most

vulnerable to climate change are those who are more sensitive to events like heatwaves and those who have less capacity to adapt and respond to the stresses caused by climate change.” The research done for the plan showed that certain wards in DC, specifically 7 and 8, are extremely vulnerable to changes related to climate change, and the plan hopes to take that into consideration in carrying out its plans for increasing climate resilience throughout the city’s buildings and infrastructure.

Denver, Colorado:

Issues: Homelessness and water shortages have been the main issues for Denver in the past.

Plan: Denver issued its Climate Protection Fund Five-Year Plan [5] in 2021.

Marginalized Communities: There was a lot of language referring specifically to marginalized communities, such as indigenous peoples and low-income populations. Equity appears to be a big part of the plan, as one section talks about a quote from the Climate Protection Fund and interprets it as meaning “at least half of the funding issued through the CPF should go toward projects that directly benefit people of color and Indigenous people, low-income households, people living with chronic health conditions, children, older adults and others most impacted by climate change.” This attention to equity is repeated many times throughout with references to the same quote and same groups of people who may have been seeing disproportionate impact from climate issues.

Homelessness: As mentioned before, homelessness has been and continues to be a problem the city of Denver struggles with. However, with the election of new mayor Mike Johnston came a flood of developments in Denver’s homelessness action plans. Just one day after his inauguration, Johnston declared

a state of emergency over the homelessness in Denver [6], and his election homelessness pledge of building 20 “micro-communities” in four years an effort to reduce the number of people on the streets [7] and his new plan to house 1,000 people experiencing homelessness in Denver by the end of 2023 [8] are still ongoing as of the time of this writing. Overall, it seems like the issue of homelessness is going to be treated with the utmost attention under Johnston’s office.

Affordable Housing: With affordable housing plans already in place, the CPF Five-Year Plan talked about affordable housing in its equity plans. Some notes were affordable housing providers being mentioned in the lifetime contributions to equity section of a chart detailing Denver’s decarbonization and equity targets: “100% to Human Service Providers (HSPs) Qualified HSPs include, but are not limited to, affordable housing providers,” as well as electrification for affordable housing for efficiency being a big part of the plan’s budget: “Energy efficient homes, offices and industry - Invest \$6,793,900 in the steam to electric incentive program; fund work in electrification for affordable housing and incentives geared toward residential energy efficiency.” In addition, after the CPF Five-Year Plan was published, the affordable housing plans were expanded upon [9], including policies like “requiring new residential development of 10 units or more to designate 8% to 12% of the units as affordable, regardless of whether the home is for rent or for sale.” Overall, Denver’s affordable housing plans both in and of itself and also in relation to its climate and equity plans seem to be solidly in place.

Natural Disasters: The CPF Five-Year Plan includes multiple mentions of extreme weather, specifically how marginalized groups can be disproportionately impacted by them, which is great. It talks about “improv[ing] infrastructure conditions (e.g., reduced vulnerability to flooding, increased access to cooling, increased access to green space, etc,” tracking data

related to “increased heat, decreased air quality, wildfires, increased drought and related water scarcity, [and] increased intensity of extreme weather (e.g., hail, wind, flooding).” The budget breakdown also includes a large portion dedicated to “projects that increase access to cooling and green space, improve infrastructure and reduce vulnerability to flooding, specifically to benefit disproportionately impacted communities; and produce a cost-benefit analysis of cost avoidance for climate impacts.”

Extreme Heat: Similarly to DC’s plan, Denver also breaks down what groups are most vulnerable for certain risks, this time specifically extreme heat: “Interconnected socioeconomic, health and environmental conditions increase heat vulnerability. Denver’s heat vulnerability index demonstrates that these factors converge, making neighborhoods in north and west Denver the most vulnerable.” As mentioned above, the plan makes many mentions of green spaces and cooling areas as well, showing a clear dedication to decreasing the impact that extreme heat has on the population of Denver as a whole. Overall, Denver’s CPF Five-Year Plan featured some of the most in-depth and detailed actions and mitigations for impacts caused by climate-related weather and extreme heat.

Phoenix, Arizona:

Issues: As a city located in the middle of the Sonoran Desert, Phoenix has always had issues with water shortages and extreme heat. However, just like many cities around the United States, Phoenix also needs work on equity issues.

Plan: A big part of Phoenix’s response to the issues it faces is its Drought Management Plan, first published in 2015 and reaffirmed in 2021 [10]. This plan details water supplies, water deliveries, shortages, and demands, but in it,

Marginalized Communities: there is a very limited mention of equity and no mention at all specifically of marginalized communities. What it does say is it makes sure that communities as a whole would be thought of when implementing certain measures: “The [stakeholder] commission’s purpose would be to provide the [Water Services Department] Director with guidance and feedback regarding potential implementation measures, to help the Director to understand how such measures may affect their communities.” This does show that the plan has some thought for the population of the city in mind, but throughout the plan, apart from a few mentions of equity such as in the discussion of a drought surcharge (“...fairness and equity concerns are largely overcome by granting customers the choice to curtail demand in ways that least impact their lifestyle...,” there is no actual mention of any attention paid to underrepresented or marginalized communities who may suffer disproportionate impacts from these droughts. One plan that does see some mention of at least low-income populations, though, is the updated 2021 version of Phoenix’s Water Resource Plan [11], which says that “higher water rates, potentially in the form of emergency tiers that penalize very high-water users and protect low-income residential customers could be employed during a supply shortfall. Given the current affordable cost of water in Phoenix, these types of increases would be mostly symbolic for most customers unless dramatic increases were implemented, but when used with advertising and outreach campaigns these measures could be important in sending the signal that water is a scarce commodity.” This brief mention is still the only talk about any marginalized groups in Phoenix’s water and drought plans.

Homelessness: Phoenix also has its fair share of problems surrounding homelessness, and in 2020, the state government published a document titled

Strategies to Address Homelessness [12]. The document breaks down the different types of people possibly experiencing homelessness in the area (e.g. chronic, first time, even those suffering from mental illnesses or experiencing domestic issues), which is a major positive that many other homelessness plans don't include. Another big focus that can be seen is the focus on racial equity as that is defined throughout the document as well, which is another positive. The strategies include short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans, including those for rapid rehousing and different sections for different age groups and other marginalized or mistreated communities such as veterans and the LGBTQ+ community. The strategies timeline is extremely detailed and broken down, which makes this plan to address homelessness one of the best in the nation.

Affordable Housing: Phoenix does not have a great affordable housing infrastructure, but at least it is under constant development. According to the government website on building affordable housing [13], proposals can be made for identifying potential projects, and the city has announced that it wants to build affordable housing on any unutilized lands [14]. The same article states that "there are only 26 affordable and available rental homes per 100 extremely low-income renter households in Arizona, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition [15]," which is, of course, a problem that needs to be solved. Phoenix does seem like it realizes and recognizes this issue and is trying to work towards fixing it, though the outcomes are yet to be clearly seen.

Natural Disasters: In the above mentioned Drought Management plan, natural disasters and extreme weather events are noted, but what it says is that "Phoenix is not particularly vulnerable to earthquakes, blizzards, hurricanes, tornadoes, or other natural disasters, but it is nearly always hot and dry here, and

drought is a constant threat." So, it seems to make sense for Phoenix to not have much in plan for those natural disasters, but it also makes sense for it to have mitigation plans for extreme high temperatures.

Extreme Heat: Phoenix has a government website dedicated for awareness and alerts about the extreme heat issue [16], and one of the things that the city is attempting to try to mitigate the temperatures is planting more trees to provide shade and cool areas. The "Urban Forest" page on Phoenix's government website [17] details plans and spreads awareness to the population of the city on the benefits of planting trees, and in 2010, Phoenix published the Tree and Shade Master Plan [18] which mainly strived to raise awareness to the public and talk about revised city ordinances for better tree protection and shade standards. Overall, Phoenix seems to be extremely focused on the issues of high temperatures and water shortages, which leads to less attention on serving people who may be disproportionately affected by those hazards.

Los Angeles, California:

Issues: LA is city that has many issues surrounding marginalized communities, especially people experiencing homelessness. Of course, like every other city in the world, climate change is affecting it as well.

Plan: In March of 2023, the county of Los Angeles published a revised draft of its 2045 Climate Action Plan [19], which along with addressing many climate-related issues, also talks about many marginalized communities.

Marginalized Communities: In Section 1.6 Climate Equity, the plan shows how focused it is on equity issues in LA, stating that "The 2045 CAP is intended to be inclusive, accessible, and meaningful and prioritizes frontline communities, which are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income

households that have historically experienced a disproportionately high share of environmental impacts.” It is extremely positive that the plan spotlights marginalized communities which have and will continue to experience disproportionate impacts based on climate change, and this plan is one of the best in the entire nation at making sure equity is taken care of. These frontline communities continue to be a prevalent part of the plan throughout, with some mention of special action in many sections, including ones about anti-displacement or public transit.

Homelessness: In April of 2023, LA mayor Karen Bass reported that she told President Biden that the federal government should help solve some of the homelessness issues in Los Angeles in order to get closer to reducing nationwide homelessness by 25%. This comes with Bass having vowed to spend a \$1.3 billion budget on addressing homelessness in Los Angeles [20]. Though this may seem like the focus is on changes made in the future meaning changes have been scarce in the current or past, LA County’s Homeless Initiative actually has done a lot of work to address homelessness [21]. The county has reportedly provided housing for 80,000 people over 5 years [22] and hopes to continue the work, especially with the publishing of the New Framework to End Homelessness [23], which details next steps, rehousing, revisiting previous strategies, and noting “that there is a need to focus on how best to serve this vulnerable population [of those experiencing homelessness].” Homelessness has been a huge issue for LA, and the work to address continues to be done through the future.

Affordable Housing: Along with homelessness, the LA County Homeless Initiative also has a website about the county’s affordable housing program [24]. It states that “with the region’s dire affordable housing shortage of 500,000 units leaving many people on the brink of homelessness, Los Angeles County is pursuing

three P’s: Production of new affordable housing; Preservation of existing affordable housing; and Protection of tenants and related supportive programs, including pathways to home ownership.” Clearly, the county is taking the right steps forward in dealing with this shortage and need for more affordable housing units, and in the 2022 Affordable Housing Outcomes Report [25] there even is a section “Advance Racial Equity in Housing Programs” that sees recommendations including one to end exclusionary zoning to maximize building of affordable housing.

Natural Disasters: The previously mentioned 2045 CAP makes many mentions of possible natural disasters, such as wildfires, floods, and mudslides. The plan includes an LA County Climate Vulnerability Assessment which “assesses risks and challenges to Los Angeles County from climate change... [and] builds on the findings of California’s Fourth Climate Change Assessment, with an emphasis on social vulnerabilities and the dangers of cascading impacts, where harms to one type of infrastructure can affect other facilities or systems, related services, and the people who rely on them.” The plan’s general focus on serving the vulnerable communities continues in its climate change action and plans for natural disasters like the ones listed above, which is a positive sight, as the 2045 CAP is the only plan out of ones in this research that stuck with the focus on marginalized communities throughout its natural disaster and climate change action plans. The climate action plans themselves included more green infrastructures and highlighting the structures and communities most at risk from the natural disasters and/or other climate change impacts and building from there.

Extreme Heat: The 2045 CAP does not go as in depth into dealing with extreme heat as a city like Phoenix, but it does contain promoting “focus on conservation and restoration of existing forest lands and urban forests to sequester carbon and support local

ecosystems” and in turn reducing the urban heat island effect that causes such extreme temperatures within Los Angeles. The Climate Vulnerability Assessments performed yielded many mentions of extreme heat as serious climate change impacts, followed by a possibility of additional parks as a way to mitigate the effect. Overall, Los Angeles’s plans included a strong, perhaps the best out of the cities in this research, focus on serving underrepresented communities such as those experiencing homelessness, low-income populations, and people of color, but it still features some very positive homelessness and affordable housing plans, with solid assessments on climate change related natural disasters and extreme temperature issues that will need to be mitigated in the future.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Issues: New Orleans is a coastal city that has experienced many problems with extreme weather in the past, notably with hurricanes such as Katrina and flooding. New Orleans is also a very racially diverse city, but with that comes marginalized communities that need to be incorporated into plans.

Plan: The main climate action plan of New Orleans is its Net Zero by 2050 Plan published in December of 2022 [26], which features “A Priority List for Climate Action in New Orleans” including, of course, net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Marginalized Communities: In this list, there are lots of places where marginalized communities are taken into consideration in its goals and strategies. In the strategy section “Generate More Clean Energy Locally,” it states that “as of October 2022, there is an open docket to revise some of these [previously installed] community solar rules to make projects more feasible and the City is eager to finalize that so some of its planned solar projects can participate. With a very

specific allocation reserved and preferred rates for low-income customers, this program supports the call by the Climate Action Equity Working Group to help residents to reduce the cost of electric bills while also providing them access to renewable energy.” This shows the attention given to making sure that low-income populations who may have a harder time paying for certain bills, but it’s also not the only place where low-income and other marginalized groups are taken care of in this document. Just one more example is the discussion of “promot[ing] sustainable business practices and jobs,” where it talks about the AdvancingCities grant, a “3-year, \$5M grant that the City is using to develop a robust blue/green infrastructure workforce training pipeline that prepares high school youth, opportunity youth, people of color, and low-income residents for high-wage jobs in the City’s growing water management sector.” With so much consideration for marginalized communities woven into every section of the plan, New Orleans’ Net Zero by 2050 Plan is one of the best in that regard in this research.

Homelessness: New Orleans’ response to the homelessness issue in the city only came rather recently, with the creation of The Office of Homeless Services and Strategy in March of 2023 [27]. This office will hope to provide housing for those who are experiencing homelessness throughout New Orleans, whether that be as a result of extreme weather events or other causes, but as of now, the problems revolving around homelessness are still ongoing, since this is a relatively new creation.

Affordable Housing: In the same Net Zero by 2050 Plan mentioned above, the affordable housing need is noted in the priority section titled “Establish a Regional Green Bank With Finance New Orleans (FNO)”, saying that “FNO has been working since 2018 to expand its mission from a sole focus on affordable housing to coordinate with the City and other agencies to

‘improve the quality of life in the City of New Orleans by investing in affordable housing, economic development, and climate resilience projects that produce quality jobs and wealth for residents.’” The interconnectedness between New Orleans’ affordable housing situation, consideration for marginalized groups, and its climate change plans is good to see, especially considering the city’s affordable housing plan named Housing for All [28] (published in February of 2022) is looking to “close the racial wealth gap” in work to address the shortage of affordable housing,

Natural Disasters: New Orleans is a city that has been leveled by natural disasters multiple times in the past, so naturally, the city has strong mitigation plans for natural disasters, especially with climate change causing more extreme weather events. The Net Zero by 2050 Plan makes a reference to the 2021 New Orleans Hazard Mitigation Plan [29] in its Climate Risks and Hazards section, where projections of more damage caused by extreme weather such as hurricanes, intense rainfall, and periods of extreme heat are discussed. In the actual mitigation plan itself, there are sections on hazard identification, capability and risk assessments, as well as a very detailed section on mitigation strategies. The mitigation plan document also includes many mentions of disproportionate impacts and vulnerabilities, including saying that “race and ethnicity correlate with social vulnerability. This vulnerability translates to a lack of access to resources, cultural differences, and the social, economic, and political marginalization associated with these disparities.”

Extreme Heat: The Net Zero by 2050 Plan also recognizes the increasing risk of extreme heat in the city, and includes resilience strategies to address it. Its main aim to combat rising temperatures is with “build[ing] additional green infrastructure,” not an uncommon theme across cities, and it appears that a big project the city is taking on is a “reforestation

master plan” in partnership with Sustaining Our Urban Landscape, which will call for “10% canopy coverage in 10 years in all neighborhoods to ensure equity.” Extreme heat is also well detailed and mitigation strategies for it are shared throughout the previously mentioned 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan. Overall, New Orleans is a city that not only focuses on combating climate change and the events that come with it, but it does so with clear attention on serving marginalized communities who may be disproportionately impacted

Toronto, Canada:

Issues: Toronto is a city facing climate change just like the rest of the world, but it also faces issues in income inequality and affordability of living.

Plan: Starting off with Toronto’s main climate action plan, TransformTO. Like many others, it has the goal to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions, this one by 2040. However, the plan has many positive considerations for marginalized communities.

Marginalized Communities: On the TransformTO website, there is a blog titled Ensuring net zero targets are achievable, effective and equitable [30], and in it, it makes the following statement:

“Pursuing net zero targets should not be to the exclusion or detriment of historically marginalized communities. In fact, a company can support these communities through its net zero implementation. Renewable electricity can be purchased from companies with a proven track record of increasing energy access. Carbon credits can be selected which benefit these communities. Low-carbon products and services can be procured in a manner which improves the equitable distribution of benefits of

the net zero economy. Businesses should use the transition to a net zero economy to create livelihood opportunities for the people who need it most.”

This statement is a very positive sign for the entire TransformTO plan and its considerations towards marginalized communities, and the fact that it even brings up possibilities for the communities to be supported further through the plan is great as well.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing: Toronto also has a plan to address the issue of homelessness in the city, although homelessness is not as widespread of an issue as it is in other cities previously looked at in this research. Toronto’s HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan [31] looks to approve 40,000 new and affordable rental housing units, which would include 18,000 units “for vulnerable residents including people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.” Not only does this HousingTO plan have very detailed and forward-looking plans to address both the issue of homelessness and produce large numbers of affordable housing units, it also has a section dedicated to Indigenous Community Partners, recognizing the land’s past and committing to helping indigenous populations who may be struggling to find housing options, due to either economic situations or discrimination.

Natural Disasters: For natural disasters, Toronto has in place yet another plan: named Toronto’s First Resilience Strategy. [32] It reports that “Toronto is experiencing more frequent heatwaves, flooding, extreme cold, and other severe weather.” The strategy breaks down into 10 goals and 27 actions spread out through the three sections of “People and Neighbourhoods,” “Infrastructure,” and “Leading a Resilient Strategy,” with a focus on a “community-led vision” to help address the climate change issues in

Toronto. In addition, the strategy focuses partially on equity, saying that “advancing equity is a core component of building resilience” on its website. Infrastructure’s ability to allow the city to be more resilient to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce hazards and risks from extreme weather events are also noted throughout the strategy in the appropriate sections, making the strategy very detailed and well planned.

Extreme Heat: Not only does Toronto periodically suffer from extreme heat, but it also has extreme low temperatures during the winters. To combat this, the resilience strategy looks to “expanding the scope of the [resilience] assessment so that it addresses a more holistic set of risks, including extreme heat, cold/freezing, and power failures,” and improve buildings and other infrastructure to be more built to withstand both extremely high and extremely low temperatures. In addition, added from the resilience strategy is a separate and new Heat Relief Strategy published in May of 2023, where it talks about the Heat Relief Network, “a collection of over 400 publicly accessible facilities across the City that may provide air-conditioning, respite from heat, and other forms of cooling,” staying active all throughout the summer months. Public pool hours are also extended in this plan, as well as policies ensuring people experiencing homelessness can access cool spaces and heat relief. Overall, Toronto’s massive network of strategies leads to the city having very detailed plans for all different issues involving climate change and marginalized communities, and the focus on serving the underserved throughout remains just one of many positive notes for the city.

London, United Kingdom:

Issues: London is a city that historically has suffered from many of the same issues as the previously mentioned cities.

Plan: London has a multi-part plan to combat climate change [33], including sections such as Net Zero Carbon by 2030 and cutting transport emissions to address air pollution issues in the city.

Marginalized Communities: One section that stands out, though, is its section titled “Addressing Inequality,” which is a positive sight to see. It states that “the poorest communities and black and Asian Londoners are being hardest hit by toxic air, flooding, overheating and a lack of access to green space,” and noting which communities may suffer from disproportionate impacts is always a good thing in climate action plans such as this one. It also utilizes a climate risk map [34] and plans on “targeting [their] funding programmes to help those most likely to be affected by these issues.”

Homelessness: London published its first plan to address homelessness in the city in June of 2018, named the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action [35]. This plan includes sections that plan to help people experiencing homelessness both in the present and the future, with sections titled “An immediate route off the streets” and “The support people need to rebuild their lives.” The website states that one of the main focuses of the plan is to “invest additional funding in developing new homes earmarked for rough sleepers, and obtain new funding to support rough sleepers once they are housed, as well as for a pan-London ‘Housing First’ initiative,” which shows how the city may funnel some of its budget and funding on developing housing to help those in need of shelter.

Affordable Housing: On a connected note, London has “two capital funding programmes to support the delivery of new affordable homes in London,” which is always a good sign. To start of with, Mayor Sadiq Khan

published a plan in November 2016 named “Homes for Londoners: Affordable Homes Programme 2016-2021 [36], which was later extended to 2023 due to the effects of COVID-19. This program funded affordable homes such as “London Affordable Rent - for people on low incomes,” “London Living Rent - helping Londoners on average incomes save for a deposit to buy their first home,” and “London Shared Ownership - for people who want to buy but can't afford the open market.” This plan also included an addendum in 2018, which took into account “the additional £1.67bn the Mayor secured from central Government in the Spring Statement 2018.” In all, the fund was £6.47bn throughout the 7 years of this program, which shows the dedication the mayor and government were willing to put into building new affordable homes for the citizens of London. London also has in place a “Homes for Londoners: Affordable Homes Programme 2021-2026” plan [37] with £4bn in place to fund additional construction with “completions expected by 2028.” All of this financial capital has seen London’s affordable housing situation improve, with even greater results expected in future years.

Natural Disasters: In terms of the plans regarding natural disasters, London has in place a “Severe Weather and Natural Disasters Framework,” last updated in July 2022. [38] This framework includes considerations for low, medium, and high impact events, as well as a section about “long term planning and adaptation,” in which community resilience and preparedness actions are detailed. In addition, the framework goes over “hazard specific impact information” including mapping and aid support for flooding, wind, snow and ice, fog, thunderstorms, lightning, drought, wildfire, air quality, volcanic hazards, and space weather, which shows how detailed and prepared the city wants to be in order to protect its citizens from these extreme weather events and natural disasters.

Extreme Heat: The same framework includes writing for both extreme heat and extreme cold, sandwiched in between some of the aforementioned plans for severe weather. One positive thing to note is the fact that the impacts on different communities, such as “older age groups,” “street sleepers,” and people with alcohol and drug dependency issues, are all noted, along with many other groups. The disproportionate impact to the health of different communities is detailed very well, to go along with the risks in transportation and possible impacts in emergency services. All of this, in addition to government guidance pages titled “Hot weather and health: supporting vulnerable people” [39] and “Adverse Weather and Health Plan” [40] where it goes over how to recognize symptoms of heatstroke etc. as well as possible health warning alerts, leads London to have one of the most comprehensive plans for extreme temperatures out of cities in this research.

Discussion:

After going through in detail so many different plans of so many different cities, there are lots of takeaways to be had. It's good that a lot of cities have plans for affordable housing (e.g. building more housing, more homes), and most plans do talk about low-income populations a bit. Looking at the color-coded table above, I believe that it is a good thing that so much of it is green and yellow, and the only red is in fact somewhat excusable for Phoenix. However, in an overarching sense, it can be said that it's bad that there aren't specific plans for people experiencing homelessness with regards to extreme heat and flooding. Although it helps that there are some kinds of plans in place, there isn't specific language for this issue found in the plans that I analyzed. There is also little specific language on communities of color. For example, multiple plans talk

about low-income populations and marginalized communities, but don't talk specifically about race or the communities that may be discriminated against because of their race. Especially in the United States, where race can be the sole reason a community or city suffers from conditions such as being an urban heat island, it feels like cities should talk more about the environmental justice part with regards to race in their climate change, homelessness, or affordable housing plans.

Specifically, which cities are doing well? To start off with, DC is doing very well, with mayor Muriel Bowser making sure that there is very in-depth language about marginalized communities with its Clean Energy DC plan. DC also has some of the most established affordable housing infrastructures, even including online resources. Moving on to the city that is doing the best job with homelessness and affordable housing, which has to go to Denver. Newly elected mayor Mike Johnston is at the forefront of the new homelessness plans set in place just this year (2023), and with the way things are looking in addition to Johnston's promises during his campaign, Denver seems like it's on pace to sort out its historically bad problem surrounding homelessness. Last but not least, London deserves to be talked about here, with a plan specifically targeting to help low-income populations. Targeting funding programs to help those most likely affected by issues is a smart way to ensure that work gets done, and that has been the method London has taken in order to combat both climate change and economic inequality. In terms of specific strategies and plans that looked promising, Toronto's HousingTO and TransformTO, New Orleans and DC's respective Net Zero plans, and LA County's Homeless Initiative are the ones that caught my eye the most.

Conclusion:

Though cities tend to be doing pretty well in terms of dealing with the above listed issues individually (homelessness, affordable housing, climate change, extreme temperatures, natural disasters, etc.), there is a noticeable lack in terms of strategies to combat issues where two or more of those issues may intersect. This leaves some of the most important issues in the broad spectrum of environmental injustices, such as how certain communities of people experiencing homelessness or economic inequality or both can be disproportionately impacted by climate change, whether that be extreme temperatures or natural disasters like covered in this research, or other issues such as pollution. This just proves that although progress is being made everyday and the United States and the world are moving in the right direction, the job is still not finished. In the future, what changes will be made by cities trying to finish said job? Will the youth get tired of waiting for their governments to make changes and start acting themselves? It remains to be seen.

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