

Items for the Information of the Partners in Project Green Executive Management Committee

TO: Chair and Members of the Partners in Project Green Executive Management Committee
Tuesday, April 14, 2026 Meeting

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: DECARBONIZING BUILDINGS EVENT SUMMARY AND KEY INSIGHTS

KEY ISSUE

High-level summary of the Decarbonizing Buildings: What's Holding Us Back? event and associated report developed in collaboration with Earth District, highlighting thematic insights relevant to building decarbonization across the Greater Toronto Area.

RECOMMENDATION:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the report on Decarbonizing Buildings Event and Summary and Key Insights, be received.

BACKGROUND

On May 2, 2025, Earth District and TRCA's Partners in Project Green co-hosted Decarbonizing Buildings: What's Holding Us Back?, marking the first formal collaboration under the TRCA–Earth District Memorandum of Understanding. The event convened leaders from academia, industry, and government to examine the persistent barriers to decarbonizing buildings across the full lifecycle: design, construction, and operations.

A comprehensive report was developed following the event, synthesizing contributions from expert facilitators, rotating discussion sessions, and participant feedback. Although structured initially around lifecycle stages, the findings revealed multiple cross-cutting systemic issues and were reorganized into seven thematic categories within the final publication. The full report can be viewed and downloaded using the following link:

<https://partnersinprojectgreen.com/resources/decarbonizing-buildings/>

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

The Decarbonizing Buildings Summary Report identifies a series of interconnected challenges that collectively limit the pace of building decarbonization while also providing a framework and roadmap for improved collaboration and action:

1. Financial Structures

Participants identified ongoing misalignment between long-term performance benefits and short-term cost pressures, as well as limited and inconsistent incentives. Financing models and lender requirements were identified as barriers to accelerating uptake of low-carbon solutions.

2. Regulations and Standards

Fragmented or evolving requirements and approval processes create uncertainty for developers and owners. Differences across municipal and provincial frameworks add to the complexity of achieving consistent compliance pathways.

3. Technology, Supply, and Infrastructure

Supply-chain constraints, grid capacity considerations, and integration challenges affect the feasibility and timing of adopting electrification and low-carbon technologies across building portfolios.

4. Post-Occupancy Practices and Data

Participants emphasized gaps in commissioning, performance monitoring, and ongoing operational optimization. These gaps reduce expected performance gains and limit the ability to validate decarbonization outcomes.

5. Culture and Perception

Risk aversion, perceived cost premiums, and limited awareness of proven solutions continue to act as barriers, particularly for organizations without internal sustainability capacity.

6. Collaboration and Integration

Siloed roles across the development, construction, and operations lifecycle limit the potential for coordinated interventions. Improved communication and integration were identified as essential for meaningful progress.

7. Cross-Cutting Systemic Barriers

Participants identified interdependencies across financial, regulatory, cultural, and technical issues. The report emphasizes that overcoming these challenges requires multi-sector engagement, shared learning, and coordinated approaches.

Areas for Future Focus

The Decarbonizing Buildings Summary Report provides a high-level roadmap outlining areas of future focus for how stakeholders could move from identifying barriers to enabling coordinated decarbonization action across the building lifecycle.

Rather than prescribing specific projects, the roadmap organizes opportunities into short-, medium-, and longer-term actions, aligned with the seven thematic insights. These include strengthening financial and policy foundations, improving data and post-occupancy practices, addressing supply-chain and infrastructure limitations, and fostering greater collaboration among designers, builders, operators, regulators, and educators.

The roadmap is intended as a guiding framework to support ongoing dialogue, future programming, research, and experiential learning initiatives within the broader Earth District–TRCA partnership.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillar and Outcome set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

2.2 Collaboration to advance a green transition

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Costs for the event and development of the report were shared between Earth District and TRCA through the Partners in Project Green Program Budget.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

The event and report provide a useful high-level synthesis of the systemic and interconnected barriers shaping the building decarbonization

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landscape in the GTA. These insights will support TRCA and PPG in continuing to track industry sentiment, regulatory considerations, and potential areas of alignment with academic, municipal, and industry partners.

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