



Hope for action beyond climate deferral

In Eugene, the home of the tree-hugger, a new kind of climate denial is taking shape — climate deferral.

In 2010, the city of Eugene released its first Community Climate and Energy Action Plan, calling for a reduction of the city's greenhouse gas emissions by 50% below 2005 levels by 2030. In 2014, the city upped the ante with what was at the time one of the most ambitious municipal climate goals in the country: the Climate Recovery Ordinance, aiming to reduce fossil fuel usage by 50% of 2010 levels by 2030. And just this summer the city released its Climate Action Plan 2.0, reiterating the same goals that it has been discussing for the past decade.

But ambition only gets us so far. At a certain point, our elected officials must move from aspirational goals to bold action — a transition which we have yet to see from City Council.

Even as the stakes of the climate crisis increase and the city continues to ramp up its rhetoric around climate action, new fossil fuel infrastructure is being constructed in Eugene. This is not the national climate leadership for which the residents of Eugene pride ourselves. Nor is it the progressive climate politics our councilors run on during election years.

Upon adopting the CAP 2.0 this July, the city already was well short of its goal of a 50% reduction of fossil fuel consumption by 2030. In fact, at our current rate of emissions reductions, there is no way we will come within striking distance of these targets first set in 2010.

Yet there is still hope for action beyond climate procrastination. In the past year, a once-in-a-generation opportunity has presented itself to our humble City Council: the expiration of the city's 20-year franchise agreement with the local fracked gas utility NW Natural. Now, the city has the opportunity and the legal authority to redefine its terms with the fossil fuel corporation and take meaningful action to dramatically reduce its emissions.

That's why Cascadia Wildlands joined a broad coalition to demand that City Council write in a ban on new gas infrastructure in Eugene, and a phase out of the use of gas in line with our CRO fossil fuel reduction goals.

This is not just an environmental issue, but a justice issue. Studies have shown that children in homes with gas stoves are 42% more likely to have asthma, and for renters and low-income households, switching away from toxic gas appliances is not always an option. Fracked gas also poses an immediate risk to the safety of the residents of Eugene. Nationally, gas infrastructure catches fire every four days and results in an explosion every 11 days, according to a report compiled by the Fracktracker Alliance. Without reexamining the role of NW Natural in our community, Eugene will almost surely fail to meet its climate goals, while ensuring that toxic fracked gas is endangering our community for the foreseeable future.

It's time for the city to put the rubber to the road in addressing the climate and social crises afflicting our city. It's time for our climate demurrers to become the climate champions that they claim they are and ensure that Eugene continues to be a regional and national climate leader.

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