

Florence couple calls for city to do more to take a stand against climate change

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Body

For the last 83 weeks in a row, Michael Allen and his allies have rallied together to call for the City of Florence do more and say more concerning the world's **changing climate**.

For Allen, at 80 years old, the future of the planet and its inhabitants is still very much on his mind.

"What do we want to leave our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren? We probably helped create the mess in some ways," Allen said. "We have to do this for our progeny and everyone else. I recognize it is a serious threat to our planet, as well."

Allen's **climate** strikes often are small affairs, with a few to a dozen people gathered outside city hall or, during two months of the pandemic, in virtual meetings. But Allen and his wife, Pat, dedicated their Friday afternoons for more than a year to demanding local action.

"We have a lot of issues that we work on. We're that type of people," Pat Allen said. "We realized early on if you don't concentrate on one thing, you will get so scattered nothing will happen. So we decided that **climate** was the underlying issue to almost everything."

Related coverage: Young **climate** activists examine race, wealth and immediacy while finding their voice in the movement

The weekly **climate** strikes are meant to encourage the city to pass a resolution pledging to fight the **climate** crisis and to start a commission for developing a **climate** action plan, such as Eugene and Lane County have adopted to steer their policies and operations.

Mike Allen believes Florence is taking some positive steps toward confronting the **climate** crisis, but he's concerned some of the city's leaders aren't willing to tackle the threat head on.

Having petitioned city leaders for years without what he thought was a satisfactory response, Allen said he was inspired by a Swedish girl to try direct action.

And so since September 2019, Allen has organized his weekly **climate** strikes.

"I'll do them until the next election, if need be," Allen said. "I'm in it for the long haul."

Climate strikes

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Allen, when he sat down in front of the Florence City Council on July 15, 2019, noted it wasn't his first time being there, but it was his first time in front of some new faces. So it seemed a good time to him to return to an issue he said he brought up years before.

"It has to do with our climate crisis," Allen told the mayor and councilors.

He read to them from a petition he'd written asking for a resolution pledging "to join forces with community, state and federal entities to address the climate crisis" and the founding a commission "to develop concrete actions for the City of Florence to take."

"It never went anywhere," Allen said.

Allen pushed the petition over the next months but felt rebuffed. Then, new inspiration came sailing across the Atlantic ocean on a zero-emissions yacht named the Malizia II.

The racing yacht carried Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, then 16, en route to a climate conference, as she refused to fly across the ocean in protest of the airline industry's emissions.

Thunberg had gained international fame for her climate strikes, spending school days outside the Swedish parliament holding a sign reading Skolstrejk för klimatet (school strike for climate). Thunberg bluntly blamed world leaders for failing to solve the crisis.

"It's insane that a 16-year-old would have to cross the Atlantic Ocean to make a stand," Thunberg told reporters after arriving in New York City in late August 2019.

Allen would hold his first climate strike outside of Florence City Hall the next month.

"What she and I have in common is that I had learned long ago if you have a cause that you want to work on and know specifically what the outcome that you want is, then you have to be persistent and consistent with that message," Allen said.

Often enough over the past 83 weeks, it was only Allen and his wife in front of the courthouse. Sometimes, he can wrangle a dozen others to join them. But they never had to be big events, he said, just consistent. Even during the pandemic, they have been present.

"We got a lot of people blowing horns and waving at us. So you know you have some backing there. They may not be activists, but they're certainly behind you," Pat Allen said. "We seem to be getting more and more people interested and more and more people working on issues. A lot of people heed our call to write letters and get involved."

Allen said 385 people have since signed his petition asking Florence officials to adopt a climate emergency declaration and take steps to develop a citywide climate action plan.

"They believe, like I do, that this is an existential threat and it is an emergency and we need to act," Allen said. "Whenever we have the need to act locally, I can get in touch."

The work plan

The City of Florence this week passed its 2021-2023 Work Plan, a biannual document outlining the city's priorities and plans, including projects the city plans for those years.

"With that document, (councilors) have outlined their priorities for the next two years," Assistant City Manager Megan Messmer said in an email.

The document's portion on sustainability and conservation has five objectives: expand the biosolids composting facility; research opportunities and analyze financial feasibility to capture and use methane at the wastewater

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treatment plant; enhance recycling and litter reduction efforts in the community; promote programs such Adopt-a-Highway to reduce visible litter; and create paths for sustainable local food production and security.

Previous coverage: Global **Climate** Strike in Eugene

The city's Environmental Management Advisory Committee has been roiled in a recent dispute over the possibility of a subcommittee focused on **climate change**. The EMAC failed to reach a quorum March 30 and had to cancel its meeting, leaving no time for a recommendation concerning the subcommittee to be submitted for the city work plan.

Sally Wantz, Florence City Council vice president and EMAC liaison, said at an April meeting she knew of two EMAC members asking the committee be dissolved. Wantz suggested those who skipped the March 30 meeting did so to avoid a difficult topic.

"This is concerning to me that our volunteers are taking extreme measures to essentially boycott a meeting so no business can take place. If you don't like the topic or agenda, at least show up, express your views, hear the other sides and vote," Wantz said. "This hot topic hasn't even had a place at the table or even had the chance of yielding a benefit."

Mayor Joe Henry accused Wantz in the meeting of being "a little unfair" for accusing EMAC members of boycotting the special meeting and they had said beforehand they had other plans.

"My understanding is that hot potato topic they wanted to jam into this special meeting was already discussed at least once or twice before and the committee decided not to take it up. That might be part of that adverse feeling," Henry told Wantz at the meeting.

At a council meeting Monday, Wantz thanked residents who sent in their suggestions on how the city can do better. She said she expects EMAC's future work to benefit the city.

"I commend those on EMAC, or even off that committee, who continue to press forward with their dreams to help Florence be a **climate** champion," Wantz said. "Thank you to those who want to help Florence be on the leading edge and keep our planet healthy."

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This article originally appeared on Register-Guard: Florence couple calls for city to do more to take a stand against **climate change**

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