



A Climate Recovery Ordinance for Corvallis



Background

In 2000, the Corvallis City Council passed a resolution to develop and implement a Climate Action Plan (CAP). However, progress towards meaningful climate action has been too slow. A general Climate Action Plan was not crafted and accepted until December 2016.

The CAP alone does not complete the process of Climate Recovery. We still need to establish an enforceable Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction target for our city, reflecting the best available up-to-date science, and define and codify concrete strategies for meeting that target. A Climate Recovery Ordinance is necessary, in order to complete our commitment to reducing Corvallis' GHG emissions.

What is the problem?

Global climate change resulting from excessive greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is a problem that transcends boundaries, and requires an emergency response. Negative impacts of climate change are now being felt around the world, harming health and livelihoods. There has never been a stronger consensus among the research community: to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, action must be swift and extreme.

Like many other communities around the world, we face drought, diminished snowpack, decreased stream flows and the increasing threat of catastrophic wildfires, which are putting strains on our economy and the natural beauty and resources that make our community so unique. Extreme heat, new infectious diseases, and the spread of pests are among many changes that will put health at risk and create unseen costs in terms of infrastructure damage and maintenance.

What can be done?

Corvallis may seem like a small piece of such a large problem, but we are in a unique position to lead the way in climate action, as we have in the past through initiatives like the plastic bag ban. Action must occur at every level, and indeed a comprehensive, community-based approach is the most effective way to tackle the problem of climate change.

The Corvallis Climate Recovery Ordinance (to be submitted to the Corvallis City Council by the Oregon Sierra Club and Our Children's Trust) is a practical, inclusive framework in support of developing up-to-date, science-based carbon-reduction strategies that will result in a significant drop in our GHG emissions. The City is presently working to implement a Corvallis Climate Action Plan, containing GHG reduction strategies that will include energy efficiency for homes and businesses, improving and increasing multi-modal transportation options, along with programs to reduce consumption and waste. To support that process, an ordinance will ensure that the GHG reduction targets are binding, measurable, based on up-to-date science, with a feedback system to stay on track.



Why an ordinance?

Our city government is responsible for maintaining public safety and wellbeing for all citizens. It has the administrative structure to carry out the legislative policies of the elected city council in ongoing conversations with citizens through public notice, advisory committees, and hearings. Therefore, developing climate change targets in a comprehensive, science-based ordinance is the best, fairest, most cost-effective way to realize proportional and timely GHG reductions in Corvallis. An ordinance clearly establishes City policy targets for GHG emission reductions, and uses an existing and accepted plan for how to achieve those goals.

What does the ordinance do?

The ordinance creates a fair and flexible framework for developing both city and citizen-based GHG reduction actions and goals. More specifically, the ordinance:

- Ensures that the most up-to-date science-based goals and strategies are adopted, and supports the Corvallis Climate Action Plan that includes broad public representation;
- Supports municipal and city plans for climate action:
 - Builds on accomplishments already made by city staff and departments, and requires a climate action plan that includes all City of Corvallis operations;
 - Sets a binding target, which ensures the current Climate Action Plan will be implemented;
- Puts city-owned facilities and city operations on track to be carbon neutral by the year 2020;
- Sets achievable, meaningful, science-based targets for GHG reductions for both the City of Corvallis and the community: 47 percent by 2025, 68% by 2035, and 85 percent by 2050, based on carbon emission levels from 2012;
- Reduces fossil-fuel consumption 50% compared to 2012 usage from the Corvallis community, including all businesses, individuals, and others working in the city collectively by the year 2030;
- Supports a plan to assure Corvallis does its share in achieving 350 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere by the year 2100.

Why now?

It's time to act. The GHG effect was discovered in 1824, shown in a lab in 1859, and quantified in 1896. And, today the effects are hard to ignore.

Added to that, general state, national and international action to cut GHG emissions up to this point have been neither fast enough nor robust enough to adequately deal with the threat. Therefore local action is not only appropriate but necessary.

The ordinance provides a way to equitably distribute costs associated with reducing greenhouse gas emissions in order to reduce potential regressive economic effects. Furthermore, a comprehensive climate change strategy embodied in a city ordinance is a practical way to promote local businesses and Corvallis' low-carbon economy.

Corvallis should take its place as a leader in local efforts to tackle climate change. This will ensure all Corvallis residents reap the benefits of a sustainable, equitable, and productive future.