Eugene Youth Take On Climate Change Issues

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On Nov. 17 a mural sprung up on the side of Arriving by Bike on 27th Avenue and Willamette. Far from graffiti, this work speaks to the civic engagement that a group of Eugene youth have been involved in the last three months.

A group of students ranging in age from 8 to 18, with the support of local nonprofit Our Children’s Trust, have attended every Eugene City Council meeting since Sept. 23 to present their argument for solidifying law on climate change in the city. On Nov. 11 the group submitted a Climate Recovery Ordinance for the council to consider.

Our Children’s Trust is working to compel governments to implement climate recovery plans based on science, rather than politics in the U.S. and internationally.

The local ordinance concerns “the protection of the health, safety, and welfare of residents and ecosystems of Eugene, Oregon,” as it is stated on the document. But the main goal of the ordinance is to “legally obligate the city of Eugene to meet the climate goals it set out and to plan for future action on climate change” says Gordon Levitt, a legal intern for Our Children’s Trust who worked on the ordinance.

Currently, the Climate and Energy Action Plan outlines much of what the city strives for in environmental protections, but does not solidify them as law.

“The city of Eugene has climate and energy goals, but they’re just goals; there’s no legal obligation behind them,” Levitt says.

Mayor Kitty Piercy has been impressed by the initiative these students have taken. “They have done an excellent job and they get better by the week,” she says.

With the ordinance submitted, the City Council must decide if it wants a public work session. “If the majority wants a work session, we will put it on our calendar and go to work,” Piercy says.

The purpose of the mural, conceived by artist Esteban Steffensen, is to bring public awareness to the issue and the specific work the group has been a part of.

“I think it’s great. They are the ones who are going to deal with the consequences of what’s going on. All of us could be working on doing what we can now to reduce our impact to climate change,” Piercy says.

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