Eugene City Council Votes to Develop Oregon’s First Electrification Policy in a Historic Move

The City takes steps to transition to 100% clean, electric buildings

Eugene, OR - Today, the Eugene City Council moved to support policies to transition the City’s buildings to 100% clean electricity. Specifically, council voted to advance two motions: the first (passed 5-2) to direct staff to begin examining changes to City Code in order to implement first-in-the-state policy mandating that all new construction in the City be 100% electric by 2023, and the second (passed 6-2) to create a roadmap to equitably electrify all buildings in the City by 2045.

Councilmember Jennifer Yeh, said:

“Building electrification will get us cleaner air, healthier homes and support good jobs in our community. Requiring electrification, combined with funding to help low-to-moderate income residents and our business community to fuel switch, will create an equitable and feasible plan to decarbonize our buildings. And when we combine that with these ongoing energy efficiency improvements, it’s easy to see how all these things line up to support our triple bottom-line of environment, equity and economy.”

Danny Noonan, Fossil Free Eugene Coalition and Climate & Energy Strategist at Breach Collective, said:

“Today the City of Eugene took its first concrete steps towards joining dozens of cities throughout this country in standing up to the fossil fuel industry, and putting the brakes on Eugene’s methane emissions. This decision is the result of more than a year of sustained, thoughtful advocacy by individuals and groups representing all corners of our community. The strong majority of Councillors who supported this decision should be congratulated for standing up for Eugenians, in the face of the dilatory arguments and industry talking-points echoed by a minority of City Councillors. “While the details will be ironed out in a forthcoming work session, and while our community will need to hold strong in the face of industry backlash, the City has sent a clear signal that methane gas has no future in our buildings or in the wider community.”

Aimée Okotie-Oyekan, Environmental and Climate Justice Coordinator at NAACP Eugene-Springfield, said
“We are happy to see the City of Eugene begin to address climate change with the urgency it warrants. The sheer scope and exploitative origins of the climate crises require an intersectional approach; it is imperative that the ultimate outcome of the ensuing equitable building electrification conversations concurrently addresses housing insecurity, energy burden, economic disparities and public health ills by directing reparative investments in frontline communities.”

Dylan Plummer, a Senior Campaign Representative with the Sierra Club, said:

“The council’s vote was a strong step forward on climate policy in the City of Eugene, and across the State. Today, a majority of council members made it clear that they will forge the path to cleaner and safer buildings in Oregon.”

This vote comes just days after twenty five climate, environmental, and community organizations sent a letter to Eugene City Council in support of these motions. Community members and climate advocates hope that the City will move quickly to pass the policy, leading the state on the transition to renewable electricity.

Cities and states across the country are embracing efforts to require that new construction utilize electric appliances instead of gas-fired ones. For most of Oregon, swapping gas for electric heating has the carbon reduction impact of giving up one’s car.

In addition to negative climate impacts, there is a growing awareness of the serious health impacts of gas appliances:

- Homes with gas stoves have 50 percent to over 400 percent higher nitrogen dioxide levels in their indoor air than homes with electric stoves, which can lead to heart failure and asthma.
- One hour of cooking on a gas stove produces nitrogen dioxide levels that would be illegal if found outdoors.
- Children in homes with gas stoves have a 42 percent increased risk of asthma symptoms.

In response to these grave concerns, NW Natural has only offered unworkable alternatives like so-called “renewable” natural gas and a transition to green hydrogen as an effort to stave off regulation for as long as possible. For more on NW Natural’s false and misleading claims, as well as detailed rebuttals, see this report.

The campaign in Eugene has broad support in the community, with endorsements from prominent organizations including the NAACP Eugene-Springfield, members of the state legislature, the Democratic Party of Lane County, the Eugene Sustainability Commission, the Eugene Human Rights Commission, Springfield Eugene Tenants Association, the Sierra Club, the Friendly Area Neighbors and Downtown neighborhood associations and many more.

Watch the work session in which the votes were made here. Find the full text of the sign on letter here.

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