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**Sent:** Friday, March 3, 2023 3:18 PM  
**To:** Heather Dimke <HDimke@cityofsalem.net>; citycouncil <citycouncil@cityofsalem.net>; SALEM Manager <MANAGER@cityofsalem.net>  
**Cc:** Laurie Dougherty <lauriedougherty@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** 350 Salem Comments on Monday CAP Committee meeting

To: City of Salem Climate Action Plan (CAP) Committee  
From: 350 Salem OR  
Philip H. Carver, Ph.D., Co-coordinator  
RE: Proposed Climate Action Work Plan  
March 3, 2023

### **Summary**

These comments reiterate our comments to the CAP meeting of Jan. 23, 2023. The proposed work plan almost completely ignores emissions from burning methane (natural gas). Urgent action is needed on residential burning of methane.

We propose an immediate implementation of action EN 31. Action is urgent because every new home with methane equipment creates an expensive block to achieving the Council's adopted greenhouse gas (GHG) emission goals. Also, we propose that the CAP committee propose a citizen climate action council or committee to guide the implementation of the CAP.

The proposed work plan does address reducing transportation emissions as the City updates its Transportation System Plan and responds to the Climate Friendly and Equitable Communities final rule by the Land Conservation and Development Commission (TL 19). The plan also addresses the requirements by the Environmental Quality Commission to reduce commute trips (TL 21).

Emissions from electricity generation to serve Salem residents are addressed by state law under HB 2021 (2021 session) which requires Portland General Electric to reduce its GHG emissions by 90 percent by 2035. Residential electricity emissions declined by 2.4 percent between 2016 and 2021, using a consistent accounting method.

### **The Methane Elephant in the Room**

This leaves the third biggest emission sector to be addressed: emissions from fossil fuel use in buildings (25 percent of the total). Burning methane in residential buildings accounts for 9.2 percent of total 2021 emissions. These emissions **grew almost 18 percent** between 2016 and 2021 [footnote #1] using a consistent accounting method. Strategies in the draft work plan to address emissions from burning methane are completely inadequate.

The City will never have the kind of funds needed to effectively encourage electric heat pumps in either new or existing homes. Currently, the Energy Trust of Oregon does not have programs to either switch existing gas furnaces to electric heat pumps or to incent builders to sell all-electric homes. There is no proposed legislation this session to require new homes in Oregon be all-electric. In contrast, Washington state and California have effectively required all new homes to be all-electric.

Action in Oregon to reduce emissions from residential burning of methane is only happening at the local level. Eugene has mandated all new single-family, middle housing and smaller apartments be all-electric by July of this year. Salem should adopt an ordinance that is similar to Eugene's.

Yes, this kind of action is controversial. But Salem has already experienced climate disasters and will experience many more if the world does not drastically reduce emissions. Marion County has already seen deaths from wildfires, associated smoke and summer heat events, all created or exacerbated by human GHG emissions.

The Salem City Council needs to show the kind of courage demonstrated by Eugene's Council. If enough cities act, the Oregon legislature will follow. U.S. cities and states need to show leadership for the world to act.

It makes absolutely no sense to plan to eventually "Implement an incentive program for residents and businesses to switch from natural gas appliances to all-electric models (EN36)" while allowing builders to increase the number of such homes to be converted. Such incentives for homes yet to be built make no sense! It is much more expensive (sometimes cost-prohibitive) to convert homes to be all-electric than to build them all-electric in the first place.

This is planning to waste taxpayer dollars, whether these are federal, state or local taxpayers does not matter, it is still waste.

Instead the Council should implement EN 31 immediately ("Implement policies to reduce natural gas usage, such as requiring all-electric new construction, prohibiting fossil fuel usage in new construction, and/or banning the use of gas and oil in residential appliances").

The Committee has demonstrated a cavalier attitude on this issue. In almost a year of existence the Committee has yet to substantively discuss this critical element (EN31) of reaching the Council's adopted goal of reducing GHG emissions by 50 percent by 2035.

### **Need for Citizen Climate Commission or Committee**

In a separate memo 350 Salem will later propose that the City form a citizen climate commission or committee to implement the CAP. Many Oregon cities with climate action plans have formed such groups. We understand that the City will be evaluating its citizen committee structure this summer.

The CAP Committee has only about 6 more hours of planned discussion this year after this meeting. This amount of time is completely inadequate. In addition, **none** of the Council members of the Committee have demonstrated the necessary courage on methane or other critical issues needed to achieve the City's GHG goals. Citizens on committees are not so timid.

#### **Footnote 1**

Residential natural gas (from burning methane) emissions (metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e)

2016: 96,815

2021: 114,074

Growth 17.9%

Note: These emissions do not include fugitive methane, a very powerful greenhouse gas.

Residential electric emissions (metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e)

2016: 171,525

2021: 167,377

Growth negative 2.4%

Total Salem emissions 2021 1,233,620

Residential methane as share of total: 9.2%

Residential electricity as share of total: 13.6%