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Climate Action Plan 2.0 a good start. Much more needed

By Bob Doppelt

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The City of Eugene's draft Climate Action Plan 2.0 is "a good start." But to be consequential it needs a much wider scope, greater detail, clarity on how the city itself will reduce emissions and more community engagement. That's what people I interviewed said about the plan.

In July 2014, the Eugene City Council adopted the Climate Recovery Ordinance. It established four ambitious goals focused on reducing carbon emissions and fossil-fuel use within internal city operations and the community-at-large. In 2016, specific targets were added for each goal.

The new plan, however, will not come close to achieving any of the goals or targets, and many people are displeased.

To understand why, I interviewed people from the non-profit, private and public sectors who had either participated in — or watchdogged — the development of the plan.

Everyone praised the city staff involved for their professionalism, acknowledged the challenges involved with developing the document and said the plan includes some helpful information. The creation of the equity panel was also lauded.

However, I consistently heard concerns about how the plan was developed, its lack of breadth and specificity and the failure to address issues the city itself has authority over.

For example, numerous people questioned why emission reductions proposed by Lane Transit District, EWEB, the University of Oregon and nine other "large-lever shareholders" are the centerpiece of the plan.

It is helpful to know that actions by the 12 large entities might reduce future emissions by 40%. But most of those actions were already in the works, so this

actually does not break new ground. And numerous interviewees questioned whether those reductions will actually happen. They are all voluntary, and the plan does not specify timelines, funding or monitoring mechanisms.

This led many people to question why the plan fails to emphasize policies the city itself will enact. It does not address zoning changes. For example, funding mechanisms to increase public transportation, locally enforceable building efficiency codes, a local gas tax or other revenue sources to finance emission reductions, how an expanded Urban Growth Boundary would affect emissions and many other important issues the city council has authority over.

Other process questions were raised. City staff met with a group of business leaders from the Chamber of Commerce, but the meeting happened after the plan was released. Many additional detailed conversations are needed, I was told, for local businesses to understand how emissions reductions will affect them and how they can contribute.

In addition, numerous people told me the plan lacks meaningful strategies to reduce consumption-based emissions — which are the city’s largest source — that stem from goods produced outside of and delivered to Eugene.

Interviewees who had read the resilience section said it is inadequate and a key member of the equity panel said, “No real plan exists to promote climate equity.”

For these and other reasons, business and environmental interests voiced disappointment that the plan does not provide a model other communities can follow.

The mayor and city council, not staff, are responsible for these limitations. They should delay adoption of the plan until it is improved, or call it Part I and require that Part II contain a much wider scope and more detail, including policies on issues they have authority over.

Bob Doppelt writes a monthly column for The Register-Guard on climate change-related issues.