

Climate-policy leadership begins with Portland

PUBLIC HEARING

What: Planning and Sustainability Commission public hearing on the Pembina export terminal

When: 3 to 8 p.m. April 7, preceded by a 2 p.m. rally

Where: 1900 SW Fourth Ave., Room 2500A

Submit

comments: Before April 7: psc@portlandoregon.gov; until April 10: www.surveymonkey.com/r/KS32FZV

ONLINE

Draft Climate

Action Plan: www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/49989

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CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

California has one year of water left and is in a drought cycle with no end in sight.

Let that sink in.

Climate change is happening, and the effects are already terrifying. The pace and intensity of change are only expected to increase the longer we wait to take decisive action. As drought continues to ravage the Southwest, we need to be prepared to welcome and care for climate refugees who will come to the Northwest in (even greater) droves due to the predicted likelihood that we will fare comparatively well when it comes to the severity of climate impacts. Aside from implementing truly equitable adaptation strategies, Portland must do everything possible to take the type of action that has the best chance of preventing catastrophic climate change. Two opportunities exist for immediate and significant action.

The first is to deny the proposed Pembina Pipeline Corp. propane export terminal at the Port of Portland's Terminal 6. This terminal endangers our existing climate obligations and runs counter to everything Portland has built its green reputation on.

According to the Audubon Society of Portland, the Pembina facility would be one of Portland's largest energy users, requiring about 8,000 megawatt hours of electricity per month, resulting in 20,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year, or about 0.7 percent of Portland's annual carbon dioxide emissions.

The 552 million to 828 million gallons of propane that would be transported through the facility each year would result in the release of 36 million to 60 million metric tons of CO₂ per year, or about 0.01 percent of total global CO₂ emissions, according to the Audubon Society.

Although there are also serious safety issues associated with the project, the terminal should be denied explicitly on climate-change grounds. Despite claims that propane is a "clean fuel" or a "bridge fuel" because it emits less CO₂ than coal or oil when combusted, propane is exclusively a byproduct of oil and natural-gas extraction projects (Pembina says this propane will come from fracking at Canada's Sedimentary Basin), which have a tendency to cause serious local environmental degradation (harming indigenous communities and contaminating water supplies), myriad public health problems, and greenhouse gas emissions at the site of extraction and through transport. When accounting for the entire life cycle of propane — extraction, processing, transport and combustion — it is wildly misleading to

use a word like "clean" to describe it. A 2014 study by Robert W. Howarth of Cornell University concluded that "both shale gas and conventional natural gas have a larger (greenhouse gas footprint) than do coal or oil, for any possible use of natural gas."

Sensing strong community opposition, Pembina has taken the step of offering a \$3.1 million bribe to local institutions, hoping to negotiate the seriousness of Portland's commitment to leadership on climate-change policy. Incredibly, part of the money is supposed to go toward implementing Portland's own climate goals. So, we would be funding our local climate action by allowing a major project that will hugely contribute to global climate change. This is pure absurdity and an example of the shortsighted bargaining that has caused society to ignore climate change since it was identified as a threat more than 40 years ago. As 14-year old climate activist Xiuhtezcatl Martinez puts it: "Past generations had a party on this planet and left it for us to clean up."

Because Mayor Charlie Hales has publicly expressed support for the Pembina project and hails it as the type of investment that Portland welcomes with open arms, the community has to stand up and make it very clear that we won't tolerate gambling with our future.

We also have an opportunity to lead with new climate policy. This year's draft Climate Action Plan has several laudable provisions, including an Equity Work Group to better ensure that communities most vulnerable to climate change — the elderly and children, people in poverty, and people of color — benefit from climate solutions; a method for accounting for full life-cycle emissions from extraction to disposal on products and processes utilized in Portland; and a call for continued investment in public transit and infrastructure for walking and bicycling while focusing on expanding transit access in underserved areas. However, the plan does not go nearly far enough given the gravity of the climate predicament.

Tackling the question of what would we *really* do if we were going to walk the climate walk, the Climate Action Coalition has proposed six policies that, if implemented by the city of Portland and Multnomah County, would set a new standard for climate action:

- A policy banning all new export, storage; and transfer infrastructure for all fossil fuels, including coal, oil, natural gas and propane. Portland can't be a climate leader while we profit from large-scale fossil-fuel projects, and rejecting new infrastructure would set a strong precedent that could be replicated by municipalities throughout the region (which is inundated with new fossil-fuel export proposals).

- A binding commitment to reduce local

carbon emissions until atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ are back down to 350 parts per million the level deemed "safe" by climate scientists. Notably, Eugene recently bound itself to reducing CO₂ emissions to its share of 350 ppm by the year 2100 through the nation's first climate recovery ordinance.

- Full greenhouse gas accounting to include emissions from pass-through fossil fuels in local carbon emissions reporting, including source emissions and consideration of environmental degradation at the source of extraction. Pass-through refers to fossil fuels that travel through Portland but never stop here.

- A plan to transition to sustainable energy in conjunction with dismantling existing fossil-fuel infrastructure. This should include a commitment to work with workers at existing utilities and large fossil fuel facilities in Portland to create an immediate transition plan away from fossil fuels to a sustainable economy that is just, equitable and beneficial to all.

- Refusal to enter into contracts with, subsidize or permit companies and facilities whose primary business is extracting, refining or transporting fossil fuels, including those that manufacture equipment for extracting, refining and transporting fossil fuels.

- Divestment from 100 percent of all fossil-fuel investments by 2020, starting the process now. Hales made vague commitments about divesting on World Environment Day in 2013. Instead, the city of Portland did an about-face and purchased \$20 million in Exxon Mobil bonds in December.

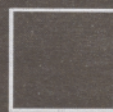
We are at the point where simply asking the state and federal governments to set strong climate policy is not an option. If we want others to make brave policy decisions, we have to lead at the local level to be a laboratory for grassroots and democratic climate action. There is no more time to wait.

Climate change is here, causing extreme harm, and will get far worse if we don't make radical changes immediately. We have the right culture and the right people in Portland to build a clean and equitable city given the challenges we face. What is needed now is a sense of urgency and the courage to do what is necessary to make good on our moral obligations to youth, future generations, and the integrity of the natural world.

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Dignity



Poverty