

CLIMATE ACTION

The city of Eugene is making progress on reducing greenhouse gas pollution, but the tough, substantial action may lie ahead.

Last year the Eugene City Council voted unanimously in favor of implementing a Community Climate and Energy Action Plan created with the involvement of more than 500 citizens.

After a year of progress in implementing the plan, “clearly we are on the right track,” city climate and energy coordinator Matt McRae told the council this week.

McRae projected a graph showing that motor fuel use, the leading indicator of local greenhouse gas pollution, has declined with the recession but was already on a declining trend before the housing collapse. He also said the city has made progress in the last year on moving forward with a majority of the actions called for in the climate plan, while a quarter remain unchanged.

But the biggest council actions on climate change could come in the next six months when elected officials will set the city’s growth and transportation policy for the next 20 years. The council will vote on whether to hold the existing urban growth boundary or allow more urban sprawl under its Envision Eugene process. Also, the council will decide whether to continue to spend heavily on freeways and roads or whether to emphasize biking, walking and buses as part of a new Eugene transportation plan.

The climate plan has three goals: reducing Eugene greenhouse gas emissions 10 percent below 1990 levels by 2020; reducing fossil fuel use 50 percent by 2030; and identifying strategies to adapt to climate change and increasing fuel prices.

A key part of the plan is a 20-minute neighborhoods strategy of compact places where residents have easy access to grocery stores, restaurants, schools, parks and other services by bike, car and transit and without having to rely heavily on cars. The neighborhoods are served by bike lanes, sidewalks and bus routes that enable alternative transportation.

“We’re certainly not suggesting that everybody has to give up their car,” McRae said. The neighborhoods envisioned “really focus on the ability to make trips without a car.”

McRae provided a long list of advantages to the walkable/bikeable neighborhoods including: reduced congestion, reduced crime from eyes on the street, access to affordable transportation, disabled access, reduced city transportation costs, reduced individual transportation costs, healthy fitness and reduced auto accidents. By allowing people to purchase less gas, the mixed-use, compact neighborhood strategy will spur the local economy by keeping money here, he said. More than two-thirds of the \$200 million spent locally on gas every year leaves the community, McRae said.

Downtown Eugene is a good example of “being able to meet a lot of your needs without having to hop in to a car,” McRae said. Other examples are in the Royal Avenue node and at 24th and Hilyard, he said.

Councilors appeared to support the climate plan and 20-minute neighborhood strategy.

“It is a measurable good,” Councilor George Poling said.

“We are going in the right direction,” Councilor Alan Zelenka said. He said the plan will save money on gas, new roads and heating. “We will have more money in the pockets,” he said. “It will be a very powerful story to tell in five years.”

Councilor George Brown pointed to figures indicating that energy use had declined even with a growing population. “That’s impressive,” he said.

FORMER BLACK PANTHER SPEAKS

Former Black Panther, Louisiana prison activist and co-founder of the Common Ground Collective Malik Rahim (born Donald Guyton) will speak 7 pm Friday, Oct. 14, at First Christian Church about preparedness in what he calls “turbulent times.”

Rahim is a recipient of the Thomas Merton Award, an internationally renowned accolade awarded to individuals who strive to enact change and social justice.

“It’s about recognizing that this isn’t really a war on terror but a war on terra, against the Earth itself and all the living things it contains, so somebody can make a buck,” coordinator Gordon Sturrock says of Rahim’s Building on Common Ground event. The Common Ground Collective has distributed aid and facilitated community health clinics throughout the United States.

“I think he’ll make a convincing case that this is a time for reaching out across all of our divides,” Sturrock says of Rahim. — *Dante Zuñiga-West*

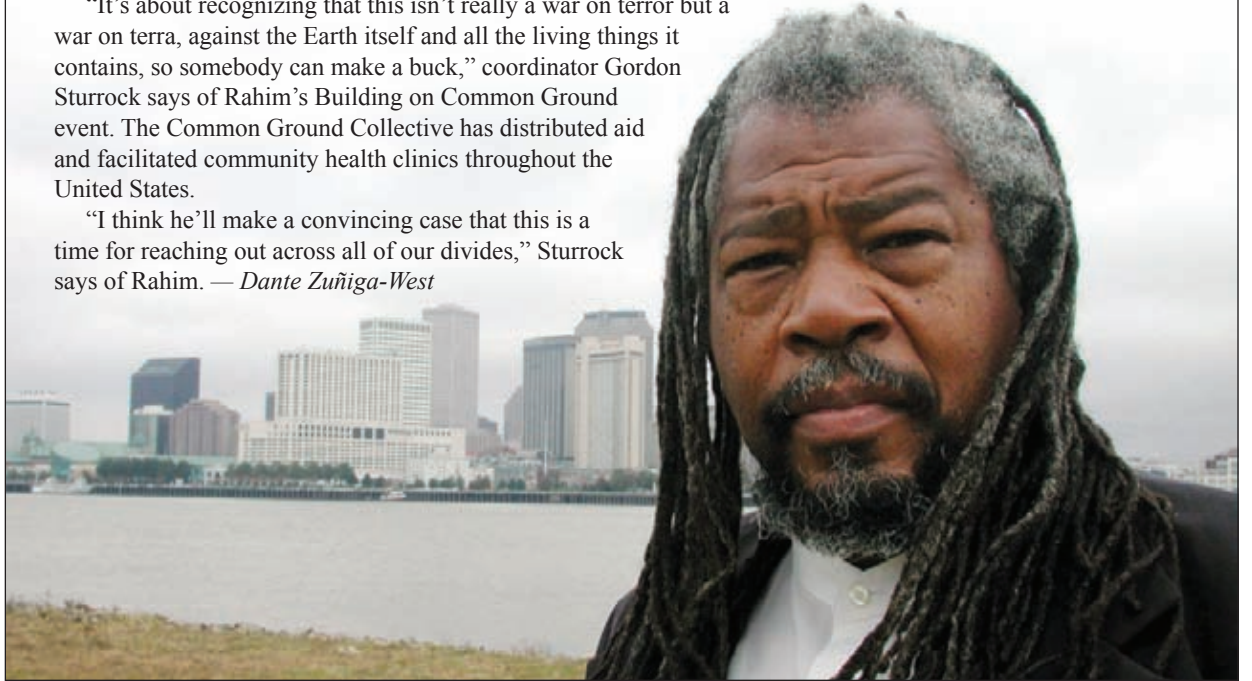


PHOTO BY TRIP JENNINGS

PROTEST FOR THE FOREST

Over the dissent of more than one hundred protesters, Oregon’s State Land Board voted to drastically increase the clearcut logging on the Elliott State Forest on Oct. 11. Protesters organized by the Friends of Oregon’s Forests rallied at the Salem meeting in an effort to persuade the board, which is made up of the governor, secretary of state and state treasurer, to look for other ways of managing the forest.

The Elliott is Common School Fund land, meaning profits from the forest go to fund K-12 schools. “We want to see schools adequately funded but not at the expense of irreplaceable older rainforests,” says Josh Laughlin of Eugene-based Cascadia Wildlands, one of the groups participating in the rally.

Laughlin says there are “24,000 acres of commercially viable plantations on the Elliott.” He says these 30- to 60-year-old trees could be sustainably logged rather than clearcutting the older native and mature forests. “Better forest practices translate into improved fishing, recreation and carbon storage,” he says.

Rally participant Trip Jennings says the land board’s vote was “more representative of the interests of a special few, rather than the general public,” and he says rally participants were frustrated by the vote.

As the State Land Board left the meeting after the vote, protesters asked the members, who are all elected officials, “Who do you work for?”

Protesters at the rally held signs with slogans including “Save our salmon,” “Carbon not clearcutting” and “Timber barons are the 1 percent.” Kate Ritley, also of Cascadia Wildlands, says the vote was “a huge step in the wrong direction.” But she says forest groups plan legal challenges as well as future protests. “We’re not going to go down without a fight.”

As the rally ended, in response to cry of “I think we know what to do next!” the crowd shouted, “Occupy, occupy!” — *Camilla Mortensen*