

## MINUTES

### Eugene City Council Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

April 13, 2022  
12:00 p.m.

**Councilors Present:** Claire Syrett, Matt Keating, Randy Groves, Emily Semple, Jennifer Yeh, Alan Zelenka, Greg Evans, Mike Clark

Mayor Vinis opened the April 13, 2022, work session of the Eugene City Council in hybrid in-person and virtual format.

#### 1. **WORK SESSION: Building Electrification**

Building and Permit Services Director Lydia Bishop and Building Official Mark Whitmill presented information regarding banning natural gas in new commercial, residential and industrial buildings to move toward the goal of decarbonization.

##### Council Discussion

- Mayor Vinis – thanked staff for providing the information related to local versus state level and permit data.
- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for the presentation; voiced concern for the environment as well as moving to a single energy source; asked staff to present information on mitigating single source risks in the future; requested financial analysis on the impacts of banning natural gas hookups; asked how drought and federal policies to protect local salmon runs will impact the Northwest’s largest renewable energy source, hydro-electricity; stated that the US Energy Information Administration reported that in 2021 60.8 percent of the national energy grid relied on fossil fuels; asked what effect reduction of the west coast hydro-electric generation capacity has on the percentage of fossil fuel reliance; voiced concern over cost volatility; noted that many fires in the west coast area have been started by overloaded electricity lines.
- Councilor Syrett – thanked staff for the presentation and information; noted she would lean toward a code requiring all electric versus a code banning an energy source; asked for confirmation that Eugene can require all new buildings to be electric without needing state approval; noted that analysis done by RMI for this specific region found a reduced net cost over a 15- year period of \$3,500 in building an all- electric home versus a mixed-source or natural gas-dependent home.
- Councilor Clark – thanked staff and echoed Councilor Groves’ stated questions; stated his greatest concerns are the costs involved and impacts on reliability and safety; asked what it cost to complete the Echo Hollow conversion to add the capacity for electrical heating of the pool; requested the statement of values for the hybrid Echo Hollow project; asked if a cost study was done for the Echo Hollow project to do fully electrical versus hybrid electric/natural gas; noted the cost estimate in 2017 to convert major public buildings to hybrid energy was \$10 million and the cost of construction supplies has gone up considerably since then.

- Councilor Yeh – thanked staff; stated her biggest concern is the cost of inaction; noted the impacts of leaded gasoline are still present in local soils and coming generations will be dealing with the impact of fossil fuels on the environment for decades to come; stated that the city is already behind in this matter and now is the time to stop increasing the infrastructure for natural gas; asked if a community engagement process similar to the middle housing project can be built, to figure out details after a target date is set; asked staff if they have looked into infeasibility exceptions and if the consultant is capable of identifying these situations or if it require a different consultant.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanked staff; stated he believes climate change is the defining issue of the time and Council needs to act faster; noted that adaptation as opposed to mitigation on climate change is going to be extremely expensive; noted that the task force on resilient energy buildings is going to bring suggestions this fall on how to use code to decarbonize; noted that the climate protection program requires Northwest Natural and all fossil fuels to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2035 and 90 percent by 2050; stated that, according to the roadmap to 2035 by the Global Warning Commission, which adds up what has been done versus planned, the City is close to being on target with overall goals; noted that the action required by local governments could be greatly reduced by federal and state actions.
- Councilor Evans – thanked staff; echoed Councilor Groves concern over the state of the electrical grid and its ability to handle an increased load; stated that based on recent reading, the local electrical grid infrastructure is more precarious than the roads infrastructure; pointed out bullet three from Good Company, financial assistance for low-income residents/, and inquired where that assistance comes from and how the program will work; asked if an unfair and untenable burden is being passed on to local residents who are currently using gas services; raised concern over converting from gas to electric; asked what work has been done to look at alternate sources of energy (i.e. solar, wind) to transition from natural gas and fossil fuels; noted that other models that he has researched have built-in exceptions for legitimate need or continuation of usage.
- Councilor Semple - thanked staff; stated this issue is so important and so complicated; recognized that residents are currently seeing the impacts on local weather; voiced her appreciation for the questions that other councilors raised and the urgency to act that Councilor Yeh expressed; inquired whether a decision to adopt code to prohibit new natural gas installations in 2023 would apply to projects started in January 2023 or if projects already under construction would be grandfathered in; inquired if new gas pipes would be installed in the streets; noted that the cost of installation for gas and electric are virtually the same yet, due to demand, 83 percent of new construction has gas.
- Councilor Keating – thanked staff; noted that the conversation is not about changing existing infrastructure, it is about code changes regarding all new construction; stated that EWEB has assured the City that it can handle the load; referenced slide 10, which shows 83 percent of new dwellings permitted in 2021 and 20 percent of permitted commercial buildings have natural gas piping installed; inquired how many of those new commercial buildings were office buildings versus food/beverage industry; asked about infeasibility assessment for industries that

cannot survive without natural gas resources; expressed hope that Eugene would follow suit with San Diego, banning natural gas on all new buildings with limited temporary exemptions and be the first municipality in Oregon to do.

- Mayor Vinis - clarified that the second agenda item can be moved to another work session; appreciated the reminder that the intent of today's work session is to discuss new construction; referenced St. Vincent dePaul's Iris Place Development which is both middle housing and fully electric; reminded everyone that Eugene received an assessment from the YMCA regarding why it had not built all electric, noting that that this document may help in the coming months; stated that residential, commercial and industrial are three very different things and, according to the data, new residential dwellings are low-hanging fruit and a great start to the process; requested clarification on what is included in commercial buildings versus industrial; suggested the City look at how industries can feasibly operate without fossil fuels.
- Councilor Groves - stated he would like to hear Councilor Zelenka speak more about his experience and knowledge of energy actions to come; noted that buildings such as hospitals will likely always rely on gas for generators; inquired how banning fossil fuels could impact an emergency operations center; noted that diesel fuel does not store well; stated every type of energy has pros and cons to be considered; noted that compatibility, capacity and stability must be considered as the Council move forward; inquired how much the City has paid for gas with the high-efficiency heat pumps at Echo Hollow.
- Councilor Syrett - suggested that the City consider banning fossil fuels as a goal rather than requiring a specific energy source; noted that the 83 percent of new dwellings that have gas connections are one- and two-family dwellings; stated that numerous California cities have taken similar action; said she feels a sense of urgency to take action sooner rather than later; noted that children and youth are currently having an existential crisis over climate and that the state actions, while good, won't happen for 13 years; expressed frustration with some of her colleagues' assertions that the local infrastructure is so fragile.
- Councilor Clark - noted that 50 percent of electric energy during peak load times is created from burning coal; stated that if we ban the use of fossil fuels in new buildings, he would like to add banning electricity created from fossil fuels as well; suggested that the peak load burning of coal arguably puts more carbon into the air when temperatures are 30 degrees or less; asked if the infeasibility assessment is part of state language or something Eugene would have to create; asked if the waivers that staff have seen in other cities allow for change in circumstance, i.e. temperature; noted buildings such as the Arcimoto plant and Matthew Knight Arena would be difficult, if not impossible, to heat solely with electricity; spoke about a local contractor who shared he has not built a home without natural gas in 20 years and likely never will again; said he believes banning fossil fuels/natural gas will push new homes and commercial buildings outside of Eugene to neighboring cities.
- Councilor Zelenka - noted that the state actions start now, in 2022 and 2023, not some time in the future; advised that HB 2021 required electric utilities to be 100 percent clean by 2040 but that does not include EWEB; asked staff to find out what EWEB's plan is; supported revised code language to clarify that a waiver shouldn't be given based on the building type but on the actual business/service that is being

done inside of the building; cautioned against comparing Eugene to the list of cities in California as they are almost all in the Bay Area and are in PG&E service area with a different regulatory framework; asked for a breakdown of natural gas emissions from fireplaces versus cooktops; asked what the projection is for new types of buildings in the commercial and industrial sectors and how gas will be used in those that have protected usage; voiced concern about the feasibility and implementation of the exemption process, how it would work, and how much burden would it create on staff and developers; asked how to define infeasible, and whether it pertains to economics or technicality.

- Councilor Evans - said he believes that residential is the low-hanging fruit of the types of buildings; asked if there is a back-up source of energy that is not fossil fuel-based, in case the electric grid fails and, if so, how can it be implemented; noted that some businesses such as restaurants rely on open flame (gas) to operate; inquired how to best address in the code the issue of businesses that need gas; noted his concern about what the exemption process will look like and if it will allow for changes in technology in the future.
- Councilor Semple - noted some people, her kids included, have opted to not have children for fear of the world they will inherit; agreed that a ban of fossil fuels in new residences does seem like low-hanging fruit that could be implemented easiest; asked if Eugene really wants new buildings/businesses that are not environmentally conscious anyway, noting the exemption should be allowed only if the business had other community benefits to offer; stated that she would like to include the public in this process and get a feel for what constituents think about the issue; noted the topic is urgent and if it cannot be done all at once, a phased approach should be considered
- Councilor Yeh - reiterated Councilor Groves concern regarding the impact of this topic on emergency services; asked staff to bring back more information on how waivers for infeasibility would work; asked staff if NW Natural is suing the state regarding an executive order; stated that if the State of Oregon cannot get the job done, and ban fossil fuels, Eugene will need to do it; asked that staff follow the NW Natural contestation of DEQ climate protections and report back this information.
- Councilor Keating- asked if it was feasible for a councilor to put forth a motion to direct the City Manager to draft ordinance language that all new residential construction in Eugene be 100 percent electric, solar or thermal by January 1, with additional work sessions to be scheduled in calendar year 2022 to determine the feasibility and possible code amendments to allow for 100 percent electrification of newly constructed commercial and industrial buildings and a pathway for potential local exemptions such as the food and beverage industry, essential service and special projects; inquired if Council is tying its own hands by stating 100 percent electrification versus alternative methods of energy; advised that he plans to make a motion with modifications to the above language.
- Mayor Vinis - reminded Council that they want to be on the trajectory to reducing fossil and fuels, making feasible changes on that path; stated that the City can and should be a model for how to do this so that other cities can follow their footsteps; noted the Council should do its homework and extra research to get this right rather than just fast.

**MOTION AND VOTE:** Councilor Evans, seconded by Councilor Clark, moved to extend the meeting by 15 minutes. **PASSED 8:0**

- Councilor Syrett- noted that it is important to nail down timing as Councilor Semple stated, to give advanced notice and lead time to builders; stated she would be in support of a motion that set a follow-up work session by a date-certain on this topic, rather than a motion that says bring back ordinance language; asked staff if hospitals are permitted under the same things as residential and commercial or if they have a special permit process.
- Councilor Zelenka- concurred with Councilor Syrett that it is too early for a motion asking for an ordinance; noted a work session to answer the multitude of questions brought up in this work session would be welcome; asked who would do infeasibility exemptions, how would they be done, and what the definition of technical or economic is; asked who the experts on it will be if it is technical, and how does that it will work if it is economic; suggested looking at alternative paths to name who is included and not have exemptions and waivers with an auto renew process to consider new things to add.
- Councilor Evans noted that this is important work that will impact generations to come; agreed that a motion is not needed at this time, but that further work sessions are needed to parse it out and develop a more nuanced set of ordinances that address the issues raised in this meeting.
- Councilor Clark - noted that he still has many questions about this topic; urged the Council to pause and bring the topic forth to the public to include them in the discussion; referenced a public poll taken that had very few votes in favor of this path; stated Council should put whatever they come up with before the voters in an ordinance or charter amendment.
- Councilor Semple - stated that councilors are getting ahead of themselves discussing waivers when they do not have complete information; noted that she is in favor of moving in stages with residential first, then moving on to commercial and industrial so that progress can be made as soon as possible with due diligence.

**MOTION:** Councilor Keating, seconded by Councilor Syrett, moved to direct City Manager to conduct a work session to determine draft ordinance language by July 31, 2022, that all new residential construction in Eugene be 100 percent electric, solar, or geothermal by January 1, 2023, with additional work sessions to be scheduled in calendar year 2022 to discuss the feasibility and trajectory of reducing fossil fuel usage and possible code amendments to allow for decarbonization and electrification of all newly constructed commercial and industry buildings and a pathway for potential local exemptions of food and beverage industry, essential service, and special projects.

- Councilor Groves- stated he believes Council is not ready for a motion regarding this matter; noted the volume of emails regarding this topic shows that the public has concerns and should be brought into this discussion.

- Councilor Clark- agreed with Councilor Groves statements; noted he will be voting against this motion because he wants many concerns to be considered in this process before a motion and/or ordinance language is created.
- Councilor Zelenka - noted he supports part of the motion, but not all; suggested the motion be simplified.

**MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE:** Councilor Zelenka, seconded by Councilor Evans, moved to direct City Manager to schedule next work session on this topic by July 31 to answer the questions brought forth in this work session and other questions submitted by the council.

- Councilor Syrett - stated without a specific date in the language she cannot support the substitute motion; offered a friendly amendment to reference a specific date and asked the City Manager to suggest a feasible date.
- Councilor Zelenka - accepted the friendly amendment to add a date specific, July 31, 2022, to the substitute motion
- Councilor Evans accepted the friendly amendment as the seconder of the motion.
- Councilor Semple - stated she would like language to address banning fossil fuels rather than requiring only certain energy sources; noted the original motion felt too complex for this stage in discussion.

**VOTE ON MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE: PASSED 8:0**

- Councilor Keating- requested that the substitute motion be shown in written form prior to the vote.
- Councilor Clark- asked for clarification if a meeting extension is required for a valid vote.
- Mayor Vinis - clarified that the motion states any questions that have been brought up now or that Council brings up between now and the next scheduled work session would be addressed at such time.

**MAIN MOTION AS SUBSTITUTED and VOTE (restated):** Councilor Zelenka, seconded by Councilor Evans, moved to direct the City Manager to schedule the next work session before July 31 to answer the questions brought forth in this work session and other questions submitted by councilors. **PASSED 8:0**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed  
Deputy City Recorder

*(Recorded by Sara McKinney)*  
Webcast of meeting available [here](#).