



SCREENSHOT OF FEB. 6 MEETING

Eugene First City in Oregon to Ban Natural Gas

COUNCIL VOTES 5-3 TO BAN NATURAL GAS IN NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS STARTING JULY 1

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A split Eugene City Council passed a ban on natural gas in new low-rise construction at a Feb. 6 special meeting, and rejected the possibility of a May ballot measure on the issue. Eugene is the first Oregon city to pass such a ban on gas in new residential construction and the 97th to do so in the U.S. Local environmentalists are celebrating the decision.

After months of deliberations and lengthy public comment sessions in late 2022, the council approved the ban, 5 to 3 with Councilors Randy Groves, Mike Clark and Greg Evans dissenting. A vote on whether to put a gas ban on the ballot had been added the Friday before the Monday night meeting.

“There will be some joy in the community tonight,” said Mayor Lucy Vinis, who spent much of the night urging councilors to take action and support the ban.

Starting July 1, the Eugene ban prohibits fossil fuel infrastructure in new low-rise residential buildings, which means those fewer than three-stories tall. Those buildings include single-family dwellings, duplexes, triplexes, quadruplexes and cottage clusters.

The Eugene City Council didn’t announce that it would vote on the ban at its Feb. 6 special meeting. The council’s only agenda item for the special meeting was whether or not to send the ban to voters in May. But during the meeting, Councilor Emily Semple put forth a motion to force the council to use its authority to prohibit natural gas in new residential buildings.

The natural gas issue has become embroiled in the national political debate, as Republican-led U.S. states, [such as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis](#), are proposing tax exemptions for those who have gas stoves to derail the electrification movement.

Clark said at the meeting that he would be OK with a natural gas ban if voters approved it, but for council to pass such a ban would “be an insult to the community.” He added



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“Climate change action, according to a poll we had done, is the fourth most important issue to the people of Eugene,” he said. “Lots of people would come out to vote on this.”

Evans said he wanted to send the ban to voters, too. “One of the things that I’ve been bullish on is the issue of incentivization for people to make changes to renewables and other forms of power,” he said. “That way the community can have the final say.”

Semple said that she opposed sending the ban to a ballot because it would invite large sums of money into the election.

Vinis reminded councilors that, as elected officials, they have worked and discussed the issue for months.

“You were all elected — and many of you campaigned on climate — because, among other things, you were going to work on climate,” Vinis said. “Councils before you have worked on this, a mayor before me has worked on this, and it is time to make the step.”

She added, “The only people who are asking to take this to a vote are the people who opposed it. The people who want this to happen are happy to have us do this work.”

After council voted 6-3 to not send the ban to the May ballot, Semple motioned for council to pass a ban on natural gas.

Zelenka said he was upset that the council had added the ban to the meeting without advance notice to the public. He said he wanted to see a package of incentives and other guidance regarding the ban before voting on it, but he did support council taking action on banning natural gas. City Council should act on building regulations like this, he said, but should let voters decide on issues such as tax increases.

Evans added that the council should consider making the ban go in effect Jan. 1, 2024.



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back a clear package of incentives that would incentivize construction without having fossil fuel infrastructure,” he said.

Vinis told the council that it had already approved a package of incentives in July 2022. “They create a roadmap, look at the decarbonization, have a robust public conversation,” she said. “This council has already approved to move forward on that. This particular motion was parsed out because it was simpler and narrower on housing that hasn’t been built because there was no cost in doing that. It has been blown out of proportion by opposition.”

Vinis added that the incentives that the council already passed is a robust package of incentives that will span a decade or two in rollout. “That should not block this action now,” she added.

Zelenka reiterated that he didn’t like the surprise motion of the natural gas ban and asked to have it be discussed at a future council meeting, a proposal that Semple shot down.

“I don’t see what we would gain from postponing,” Semple said. “We’ve talked about this for a long time, in depth, and I don’t know what we would add in another few weeks.”

After voting in the ban, Vinis thanked councilors, saying she knew that it was “painful” but an important step. “There’s much more work ahead,” she said.

Local environmentalists celebrated the council’s ban on natural gas.

The Sierra Club issued a press release of local environmentalists praising the council’s vote.

“Communities of color in Eugene are more likely to breathe hazardous air in our neighborhoods — our homes should be places of refuge, not one more source of



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environmental and climate justice organizer, said in the press release. “The city of Eugene took an important step today to increase access to healthy all-electric homes.”

Lisa Arkin, executive director of nonprofit Beyond Toxics, applauded the decision in a press release, saying that homes of the future will be free of appliances that emit toxic pollution.

“The most vulnerable families in our community may not be aware that every moment they spend cooking to feed their families, they are breathing in poisonous gasses and



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