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Local group protests the City of Eugene's natural gas ban

By: Julio Mora Rodriguez
Jun 27, 2023

A challenge to the City of Eugene's Natural Gas ban

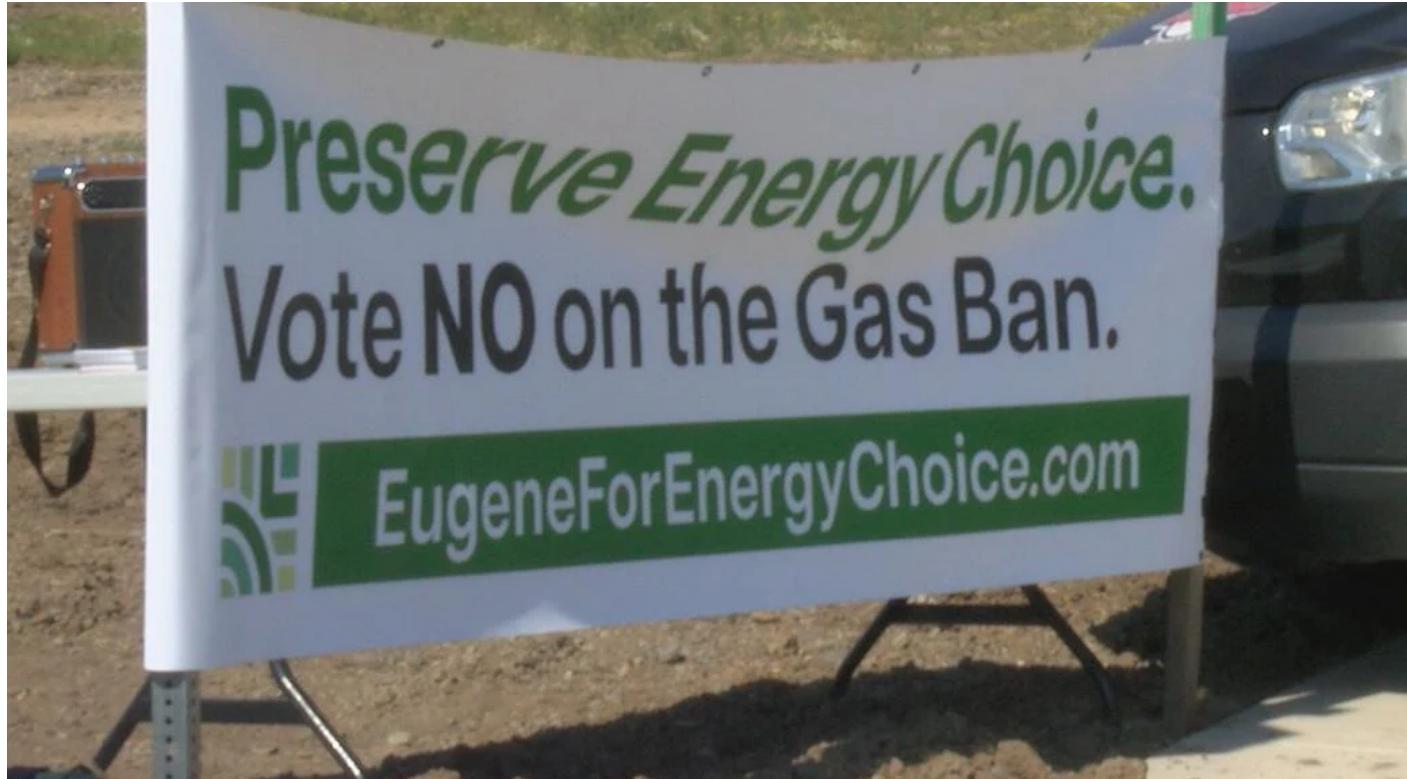
EUGENE, Ore -- One group held an event where they presented their case urging voters to repeal Eugene's Natural Gas ban in the November election.

The event was held at Barger Drive and Ohio Street at a site marked for housing development. The group who hosted the event is called Eugene for Energy Choice. They felt the housing site was the best way to express their issues with the natural gas ban. They believe in energy choice for Eugene residents and "common-sense" solutions to climate change.



Eugene City Council bans natural gas in new, low-rise residential construction

By: Karly Tinsley



The event started at 10 a.m. on Tuesday June 27. The group was a coalition of union workers, home builders, and farmers. The organization is backed by Northwest Natural, the natural gas utility company.

Tom Walter is the President of Walter Custom Homes, he's been a builder for at least 30 years. When the gas ban was first approved by the city council, he was concerned it would cost his business and the entire industry more to switch to electric. That's why he went to Eugene for Energy Choice.

Walter said, "We could certainly do that, we could put heat pumps in houses but it would be nice if people could make that decision rather than being mandated by the City Council."

The current ordinance prohibits natural gas on new low-rise residential construction. It was approved by the City Council in February by a vote of five to three. Walter is concerned the added costs will keep housing developers from coming to Eugene, making the housing crisis worse.

He said, "Housing is so expensive in Eugene and Lane County. It's really challenging for people to afford a house every time you add a dollar or \$10,000 you eliminate a lot

of people from affording housing."

Tiffany Monroe is a rural farmer who lives outside city limits. She's concerned that many of the process facilities she uses are dependent on natural gas. She fears an expansion of the natural gas ban.

Monroe said, "Even though this is an issue related just to Eugene in this context it has rippling effects on our communities and it's really important to consider how this impacts folks in rural communities."

On the other side of the coin, Beyond Toxics and Cascadia Wildlands are two environmental groups in Eugene in favor of the ban. Lisa Arkin is the executive director of Beyond Toxics and Bethany Cotton is the conservation director of Cascadia Wildlands. They agreed the City Council held extensive debate with the community for close to two years before going ahead with the natural gas ban.



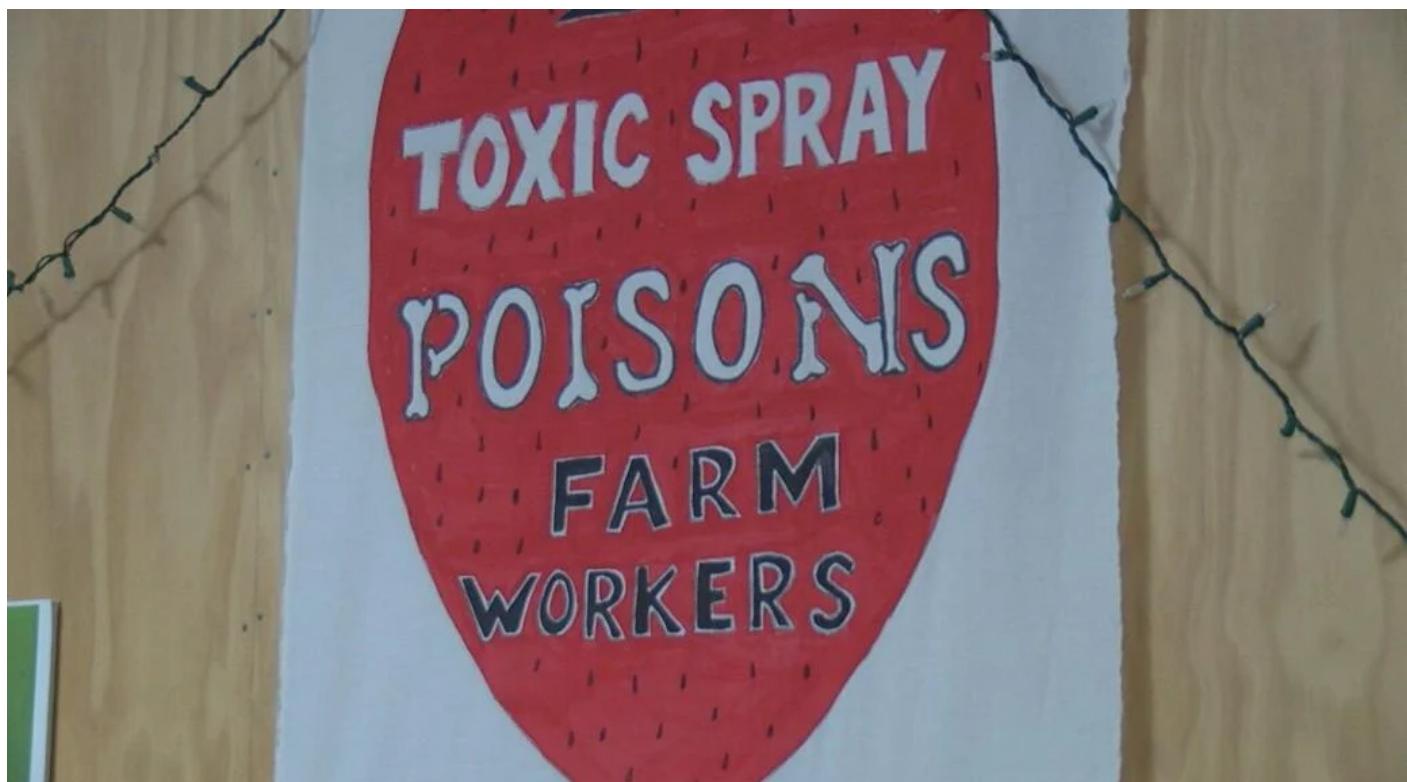
Aside from its environmental impact, they also said there are benefits to health. According to studies they cited, gas stoves produce benzene and nitrogen dioxide which lead to increase chances of heart problems and cancer. Arkin said banning

harmful products is nothing new.

She said, "And none of us would actually say, Yes! Put some asbestos in my house! It's the same analogy for natural gas, it is dangerous to human health and it should not be in the place where we live, play, and raise our children."

They also said electrification has never been easier.

"We have the advent of huge federal subsidies as part of the inflation reduction act that's going to help home owners and builders access newer technologies to build their homes cleaner and more sustainable," Cotton said. "We'll be able to do that with much less cost."



Both groups are working to educate people on these incentives. They want to raise awareness of the benefits of electrification especially in low income areas. Cotton said incentives helped her electrify her own home.

"Very, very affordable and there was a federal tax incentive," she said. "So out of pocket, my brand new perfect heat pump, hot water heater cost me \$315. I don't think you can match that with a gas hot water heater."

The decision to keep or repeal the natural gas ban will ultimately fall to the voters in the November elections.

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