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Eugene Plans for Public Health in Land Use Codes

The Eugene city council voted unanimously to create public health industrial development standards within city codes.

Eugene, OR. – Eugene City Council voted last week to create standards within its planning code to protect people from major industrial polluters. If passed, an ordinance would be the first of its kind in the state. Such an amendment to the code would prohibit polluting businesses from establishing facilities near homes and schools within a specified buffer zone.

In 2022, Beyond Toxics began campaigning for a Public Health Overlay Zone to be implemented to protect families in west Eugene from new industrial polluters after the closure of the J.H. Baxter wood treatment facility. The facility is the focus of an investigation by the US EPA and Oregon DEQ into dioxin contamination impacting dozens of residential properties just north of the J.H. Baxter site. Currently, councilors are seeking to amend zoning policies that would be applied city-wide.

“We’re excited that the council is working toward implementing public health standards throughout Eugene,” said **Lisa Arkin, Executive Director**. “This is a monumental step toward environmental justice for everyone in Eugene, especially those in the Bethel area that have been most burdened by decades of pollution.”

The city council plans to bring a draft ordinance to a vote by summer 2024. Beyond Toxics will continue to gather data and promote the community’s perspectives and experience as the city proceeds with the decision making process.

Beyond Toxics supports the city’s work to enhance public health with innovation in land use policy and is committed to ensuring families in the Bethel neighborhood are protected from industrial pollution, climate change and environmental harms. The organization originally brought forward the idea of embedding public health into land use laws in 2017, which resulted in Eugene’s adoption of the Clear Lake Overlay Zone, the first effort to meld industrial land use with public health and environmental justice concerns.

Beyond Toxics provides leadership to build a community-driven environmental justice movement for a thriving and just Oregon. We envision a society where everyone has equitable access to healthy food and clean air and water, and underserved communities are included in decision making processes that affect them. Together, we move beyond the damaging environmental practices of the past and collectively work to support and maintain ecological resilience and balance.