

Climate Action Committee

- An independent Climate Action Committee without Brown Act Restrictions can have a bigger impact on the climate

The climate action committee was formed January 7, 2020 with a specific set of objectives listed in the Staff report for this agenda item. The objectives focused on organizing and gathering information to create a purpose for the committee. Integral to the plan was the creation of the Climate Action Framework which was approved by the Council in 2022. It appears the initial goals have been accomplished and the CAC needs a new mission – implementing the Climate Action Framework they created.

During the presentation at the last council meeting the actual purpose, strategies, goals and objectives of the committee went unstated. The major accomplishments were the free mulching program and a survey of homeowners to understand why they are not rushing out to convert their appliances from gas to electricity. In passing, the Climate Action Framework was also identified as an accomplishment.

The fact that this committee uses 25 hours of staff time each month since 2020, \$200,000 in taxpayer money for free mulch and a climate framework makes little sense. The cost of increasing retail sales to increase sales tax revenue or making property improvements to increase property taxes to pay the \$200,000 in staff salaries undoubtedly created more new carbon than was saved mulching and writing the framework. The committee needs to measure the effects of their committee not only on the city budget but on the climate.

It is also pretty clear that an independent CAC with an advisory role to the city and a very active role to educate and change behaviors broadly in the community is a worthwhile effort and could contribute to Net 0. Implementing the massive education campaign outlined in more than 100 actions in the Framework would be a huge burden on city staff, none of whom are qualified climate educators.

There are many models of non-profits supporting the city that can be followed. The Senior Center provides education and information to many seniors. They host events to educate, inform and help seniors network with others.

The Neighborhood Gardeners are quite active going to individual homes to provide advice on how to droughtproof and fireproof gardens. They are educating citizens on how to lower water use. Quite similar to the goal of lower carbon emissions.

Rotary is an alternative role. They raise money and provide services to the community.

The Neighborhood Gardeners are probably the best model. CAC would be present for education at public events and offering individualized information about converting to all

electric. A home visit could include calculating the climate impact of existing appliances and the savings of going all electric. You can assess the electrical panel and estimate the cost of upgrades if needed. They can provide examples of costs to convert and available subsidies that reduce the cost. They could educate about solar rooftops as well.

It is also possible that there may be synergies that would allow you to join these groups. Rotary may be willing to take on projects to “green” the city. Seniors from the senior center could be excellent advocates and educators. Many if not most of the citizens of Sebastopol acknowledge climate change and would like to see a coordinated action plan.

To influence the city, CAC members need to attend City Council meetings. They can make a big difference. For example, in the Climate Action Framework, they advocate streets free of traffic. Last year there was an opportunity to maintain the parklets which was a step in the right direction. CAC members could have provided public input supporting the concept. CAC might also have realized the issue was the need to negotiate with the nearby businesses, so everyone benefited. The city does not have staff for these complicated negotiations and dropped the idea. CAC as a volunteer role could have helped resolve the conflicts and keep and improve the parklets.

It is time for the CAC to be independent of the city and its staff. The team needs to look at their framework, identify the actions that will influence the most people and the most change and focus on informing and educating. They can reorganize as non-profit to be able to raise funds. Talk to the Senior Center. Being independent the CAC can invite others who are interested and may have the necessary skills to educate and lobby for Net 0.