

Climate Action: Make It Real

2012 could be remembered by future generations as the year that the people made it clear that we do not want, and will not tolerate, a business as usual that ruins the climate—as business as usual will certainly do. For this to happen, however, all of us will have to stretch beyond our comfort zones, including members of the Santa Cruz City Council, who need to make a couple of significant changes to our Climate Action Plan to ensure that its good intentions will be realized.

Our Climate Plan, assembled by City staff with significant input from community members, is full of great proposals for reducing our carbon emissions. Many of them take the form of suggestions that could be carried out to a greater or lesser degree. As the Plan finally comes to the Council for a vote after several years of development, the Council will have a choice: approve the Plan with well-justified civic pride and move on, or dig deeper and demonstrate that they are willing to ruffle a few feathers for the sake of real hope about climate action.

This kind of choice puts us in good company. While greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase every year, Congress seems intent on treating climate change like political Voldemort: The issue that “shall not be named.” Yet there is a growing movement of cities and nations worldwide who are taking the initiative and doing what needs to be done for a livable future. That is the promise of our Climate Action Plan.

The question is, will we make it real? How serious are we? It’s up to the City Council now to make it clear that we are very serious. This means taking the goals of the Plan into account with every decision from here on out. It means tackling our automobile habits. And it means bringing community leaders in on the Plan’s blow by blow implementation. Here are two ways the Council can help “make it real”:

1. **Really plan for fewer car trips.** The Climate Plan calls for a 10% reduction in car trips by 2020. (Car traffic accounts for roughly half of our emissions.) While it may seem small, this is probably a realistic target. But it will only be realistic if we really do it. The Council should insist on something we don’t yet have: consistency in all City planning for the reduction in car traffic the CAP calls for. For example, why plan to spend millions on widening roads when we are planning for a 10% reduction in traffic? The money is better spent on transportation alternatives.
2. **Really make it “a people’s CAP.”** The CAP includes a number of good proposals for involving the community in carbon reduction. But it doesn’t provide for any sort of citizens’ commission or council to provide regular input and monitor how the CAP is being carried out. The staff and Council will need the perspective of thoughtful bike and bus advocates, drivers, pedestrians, homeowners, renters, builders, and others in order for us to succeed.

The City Council will have a workshop on the CAP during their meeting on January 24. On the 19th (the Thursday prior), at 7 pm, Transition Santa Cruz will host a public meeting to help formulate a community response to the CAP at Ecology Action, 877 Cedar St. in the old Sentinel Building. All are invited.

—*Michael Levy*
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