

SUMMARY OF NOTES

“COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE: Climate Crisis in Oakland: What We Can Do”

Held at Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church , Wednesday, November 13th
6-8pm

This event was hosted by the League of Women Voters of Oakland in collaboration with Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area and the Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church located at 1188 12th Street In Oakland .

“We invited community members throughout Oakland to participate with us in a roundtable that would explore what we could do for ourselves regarding climate change. Environmental health is already a significant issue to families as evidenced by high asthma rates in both East and West Oakland. Toxic fumes from recent fires affected the quality of our air for the last two years. What do we understand about carbon tax or reforestation? What of plastic bags and plastic straws? What can we really do about it? In response, we assembled a group of resource experts from a diverse field of perspectives: science, economics, public health & environmental justice to set the groundwork for a robust dialogue on what we can do for ourselves recognizing that no single entity has all the answers.”

When we speak of Climate Change we must address either Emissions or Adaptation.

We face three potential scenarios:

- Emissions go up modestly but impacts are still manageable
- Midlevel – temperature goes up more drastically and impacts go up severely
- OMG scenario – too late for solutions

Therefore our collective job is to avoid worst-case scenarios.

This means to cap impacts and emissions to the best extent possible.

Without taking action now, we are on a trend for reaching nearly 2.5 degrees Celsius warming by 2050. Therefore, to stay below 1.5 degrees C warming, emissions must be cut in half by 2020.

There is no single solution; but many solutions need to be adopted.

What is Happening Now:

- Accelerating Efforts to take Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions out of the atmosphere: *the most effective way is through plants, agriculture and forests,*
- Accelerating energy transition to zero carbon
- Recognition of the Need to Adapt to change
- Accelerating commitment to price carbon

FOOD, SOIL AND AGRICULTURE . these three interrelated areas can:

- Reduce GHG emissions.
- Remove carbon from the atmosphere (*carbon sequestration*) and
- Retain water in the soils to build drought resiliency

SEA LEVEL RISE: There is new impetus to :

- Restrict development where flooding is inevitable.
- Work at local level on adaptation plans &
- Commit to continue Education of the Public on the issue

BUILDING ELECTRIFICATION:

We need to reduce methane wherever we can so there are pro-active steps that families that can take that involved electrification:

- Drive electric autos, live in all electric homes, look at use of solar panels heat pumps for HVAC and hot water. (Not everyone owns their own home but as more people switch over, these steps help everyone including creation of secondary market for electric cars.)

Other proactive steps that can be taken:

- Vote for people based on what they're doing in climate
- Accelerate efforts to remove methane in our atmosphere –

The League of Women Voters USA supports the drive to price carbon but it has NO POSITION on how revenue is used. In California, Climate Change has been declared an Emergency. To respond to community interest, a LWV Climate Change Taskforce has been formed. 59 out of 62 Leagues are working in statewide teams

SUPPORT CARBON TAX

This community accepts that scientists and the IPCC recommend that we work to keep global warming or the Earth's average temperature from increasing below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

We need to reduce emissions to balance the costs of action against the costs of inaction.

It is costlier to do nothing than to take proactive measures:

If we apply a cost benefit analysis that weighs the costs of reducing emissions versus the damage of not doing anything the economic models suggest that the costs of keeping warming below 2 degrees Celsius is relatively small (estimated between 1% to 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030 versus the costs of future damages that could be avoided which are estimated between 7% to 20% of GDP worldwide ; therefore abating greenhouse gas emissions may be costly but climates change damages are even more costly.

Therefore our goal should be to design policies that reach climate goals at the least possible cost.

We could be pursuing policies that both

(1) reduce emissions indirectly and these include support for:

- Subsidizing research and development

- Grid /infrastructure efficiencies

- Energy efficiency mandates and subsidies

- Mandate renewable energy (e.g. renewable portfolio standards)

- And examine our land use policies: locally and regionally, statewide

(2) And reduce emissions directly through :

Regulatory policies but these are better solutions for cases that involve setting emissions standards or limits ; and therefore a better fit for addressing a single source of emissions in a community

Market-oriented policies are preferable for addressing multiple sources of emissions. Market solutions put a price on emissions. And therefore they are a better fit for addressing multiple sources.

These can include subsidizing green energy, carbon tax or cap and trade.

Equity is an ongoing challenge. Both types of solutions/policies are regressive. Still it can be argued that Cap and Trade and a Carbon Tax can offset regressivity but regulations alone cannot.

Efficiency. Market oriented policies tend to achieve emissions reduction at a much lower cost. It is 3 to 14 times more efficient in using the market-oriented policies if looking at multiple sources of emissions.

- Educate yourself and others about carbon tax (some argue that it is easy, efficient, elegant and also equitable as long as revenues are used to help the most vulnerable to lessen impacts from climate change)
- Speak Up! Question political representatives who don't support market based measures
- Examine/think hard about local land use policies—are we making things worse? or better?
- Support organizations that are working hard on efficient policies

Equity is central to securing long-term solutions. The community recognizes that the greatest burden will fall upon the most vulnerable. Organization such as Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) and West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP) and similar groups in Oakland have cropped up in response to what they saw as environmental racism. Hence they have had to elbow their way into policy tables in order to ensure that there is opportunity for community based leadership to have policy roles in addressing environmental issues such as climate change.

The communities they represent have been defined either by a geographic area that continues to experience a high rate of poverty such as in West Oakland or represent a large ethnic community that has experienced barriers to political access based on language and other socio-economic factors.

In Oakland, especially West Oakland, sea level rise is immediate. West Oakland already experiences tsunami warnings from Hawaii. West Oakland was originally

dominated by wetlands. As the city grew, wetlands and the bay were filled in. Now these same low lying areas will flood in the future as the sea level rises. Major risks include not only *sea level rise* but also *air quality* and *soil contamination* in the area.

We know already who will be the most impacted in West Oakland.

Vulnerability factors identified in West Oakland can also be applied for all of Oakland especially in East Oakland. These include not only : level of income but also whether you are a renter or own your home ,if you are employed or unemployed, born in or outside the United States, level of physical fitness, over 65 or under 18, pregnant, have access to a vehicle, or the distance you live from permeable surfaces.

Moreover in case of flooding, a city needs to look at areas where communities are (1) already exposed to contaminated sites [West Oakland and East Oakland] and (2) the quality of its sanitary sewer system and storm drainage systems—ability to hold up –that have high probability to deteriorate and not perform adequately in case of a disaster, worsening conditions and public safety for the more vulnerable.

It is worthwhile for the City of Oakland to look at lessons learned in other cities to

1) survey and assess its vulnerabilities—who is most vulnerable to flooding and adapting building codes, 2) rethink its relationship to nature; 3) study and assess impacts on resources; (4) and keep assessing its vulnerabilities to ensure that not only emergency responders know where the people in assisted living , daycare and elder care centers are located but that the city establish unofficial centers that can be identified in advance and monitored during extreme weather events.

There are many strategies that can deployed to either manage a crisis or to prevent a crisis. Both are needed but all solutions *are not* necessarily all equitable.

Managing the crisis requires early warning systems (multi-lingual) and evacuation, response and recovery plans that incorporate needs of the most impacted.

Proactive strategies may include:

- Restricting development in areas that will be affected: balancing protection of life and property against pressures to develop and meeting housing needs especially that of housing for those with less income.
- Installing green infrastructure: to manage water runoff , successful but expensive to undertake; and some would as if it help trigger displacement.
- Preserving or restoring wetlands: hold the line against development pressure.
- Raising existing structures above future sea level: balancing minimizing economic loss rather than protection of the vulnerable.
- Integrating sea level rise predictions into sewer infrastructure improvements can be done throughout city not just for the most affluent
- Building protective infrastructure should be focused on protection of the vulnerable not just minimizing economic loss
- Promoting home insurance that covers water damage (also affordable for vulnerable residents)

Energy & Climate Action Plan (ECAP) is in development. Existing plan is out of date. City is currently creating a new action plan. In its new iteration: Equitable Climate Action Plan (plan is ¾ done). Focus on where we can make biggest impact. City has made some progress but not on all things. In the City of Oakland, there has been more effort on the Community Engagement Process to ensure wider input ensuring that many more voices are heard. ECAP Advisory Committee Process – Climate Action Coalition (hosted series of workshops to inform final outcome of plan). Plan will be presented to Council for adoption in 2020 – focus on whether it’s able to be implemented & achieve short/medium term outcomes. Oakland must include:

Transportation

- ✓ Electrifying transportation
- ✓ Driving less – land use discussion

Building Codes . New buildings will all need to be electric

Electric grid : More renewables

The Port Of Oakland as a public entity that impacts 85,000 jobs in goods movement in the region has already assessed and mapped out vulnerabilities and is aggressively pursuing adaptation strategies.

Dual prongs: Emissions & Adaptation

Emissions

1) Initial focus on reducing diesel emissions for cargo moving machinery

Goal – was to reduce 85% emissions; currently at 81% reduction emission in diesel

2) New plan – zero emissions in 30 years with near time projects

Converting yard trucks to zero emissions

21 electric drayage projects

At largest terminal – currently converting small cranes to hybrid electric

Reduce emissions 98%

All large cranes are already electric

Adaptation

Living with sea level rise

State Lands Commission required all ports to do a sea level rise assessment (see website)

Inventory of shoreline – port is trustee of 20 miles of waterfront

Most vulnerable is at the Bay Bridge & site of Schnitzer Steel -recycling

Raising the levels so that the port can serve as a buffer to West Oakland

Richard Sinkoff commented that Community & Stakeholder Engagement are central to future plans for adaptation and values forums like this one as critical to finding solutions .

Reference Note: When speakers refer to IPP : This refers to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a United Nations (195 members) body that determines the state of knowledge on climate change, identifying where there is agreement in the scientific community on topics related to climate change, and where further research is needed.

Question and Answer Exchange with Resource Experts

Resource experts offered information to restrict or reduce emissions and our need to adapt to these changes in how we live and work. Voter engagement and civic participation were also recommendations for securing greater electoral power, encouraging greater understanding of the issues, and the need to continue policy advocacy to ensure that resources go to those low income communities most impacted by climate change. Resource Experts included:

- Ms. Margaret Gordon, Co-Director, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project
- Jon Haveman, Ph.D., Economist, Executive Director, National Economic Education Delegation
- Hon. Dan Kalb, Councilmember, District 1, City of Oakland & former California Policy Director for the Union of Concerned Scientists
- Richard Sinkoff, Director, Environmental Programs & Planning, Port of Oakland
- Laiseng Saechao, Political Director, Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Diz Swift, Ph.D., LWVC Climate Change Program Director

Participants raised the following questions:

Where is the emphasis in divestiture from fossil fuel industry, especially in retirement pensions?

Councilmember Kalb – sponsored requested old retirement systems to divest – successful in their divestment in coal

Laiseng Saechao – suggest that public banking may be an option to put investment

Dr. Jon Haveman – carbon tax – tax the extraction which will raise their costs and incentivize divestment

What is the port going to do to physically to protect runaways/vulnerability of the airport?

Richard Sinkoff - Runways are below sea level, building the perimeter dike to comply with more stringent federal flood maps and to deal with earthquake risks like tsunamis

What are the options for making transit free or subsidizing solar? Avenues that would help a larger proportion of the community.

Dr. Jon Haveman – communities can leverage the carbon tax

Is the cost of climate change on healthcare well quantified?

Haveman – no, it's not well quantified along with many other impacts of climate change; not doing anything is MORE regressive than a carbon tax

Dr. Diz Swift – looking into things like the social cost of carbon, but it's difficult to put a price on it;

Ms. Margaret Gordon – need to hear from healthcare community to recognize the vulnerabilities + prevention

Laiseng Saechao – need a level of transformation that is wholistic

What is the will of the City Planning Commission to force land use changes? How do you incentivize transit use? How can you force tree planting?

Kalb – City has instituted new rules on parking requirements; tree planting – aggressive towards grants but lost funding; maintenance staff is under-resourced.

Tree planting is an important part of the solution.

How can we make a carbon tax progressive versus regressive?

Dr. Jon Haveman: The tax is regressive, but the way it is used can be progressive.

Kalb: Tax is not the total answer – lots of other strategies to leverage too.

Swift: lots of ways to use the revenue and those should be equitable

Gordon: AB617 – bill that passed in 2016 for use of the cap & trade funds, WOEIP e.g. uses this funding source

How do we ensure that the revenue is going back to the most vulnerable communities? How do we ensure accountability?

Laiseng Saechao (APEN) - SB 535 focuses on equity –to ensure that the most impacted are given access to resources that can access.

What is your advice to younger people to engage in climate action?

-Ms. Margaret Gordon: got to stay with it – struggle through the process, real genuine community engagement, understand it's about everyone, get out of your comfort zone

-Kalb: elect people who are actually environmentalists – look at their voting records

-Swift: emphasize that you have a voice – they want to be elected again, participate in workshops, talk about it, be part of the government – your voice is louder than you think

-Sinkoff: look at the technology side, engineering & design/logistics focus

How are you going to integrate frontline communities so that voices are heard & strategies are implemented?

Gordon: intergenerational work & commitment

Saechao: don't rely on consultants - they limit the imagination of the frontline communities

Swift: don't wait to be invited – just go to the table

Haveman: solution is to educate

Kalb: city needs to know about who is missing – tell them

Sinkoff: best ideas came from people living in the community; developed best practices at the Port through community engagement; new plan was developed through task force/co-chair mode; and having a proactive Social Responsibility Department.

Dr. Karen Bohlke, from MLK Jr. Freedom Center: Agriculture is CO2 net emitter, thinking about forests burning down – how can we in CA confront lived conditions that limit our ability to react. **How do we more aggressively get the word out about what needs to change?** Dr. Diz Swift: there is no single answer, it's a very broad issue; education is clearly needed 'brick by brick'.