

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: May 07, 2024

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**From:** The Climate Action Committee & The Energy Working Group / Planning Department  
**Subject:** Letter of Support for 2025 Building Code Electrification Update

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the City Council approve sending out an official public letter in support of zero-emission new construction building standards for the 2025 upgrade to the building efficiency standards.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, twenty-six cities and counties sent a letter to Governor Newsom and State Agencies supporting zero-emission new construction building standards statewide in the 2025 update to the State Building Energy Efficiency Standards. By supporting these efforts, Sebastopol will join these jurisdictions in encouraging the State to move towards zero-emission buildings which refer to buildings that have no combustion-based equipment or appliances installed.

**BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:**

Following September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, over 50 local jurisdictions have shown their leadership by passing electrification building codes that go beyond California’s building standards code. California can support local leadership by developing and supporting voluntary model building standards, for example in CALGreen, that support decarbonization and can be easily adopted by local governments which Sebastopol has already done.

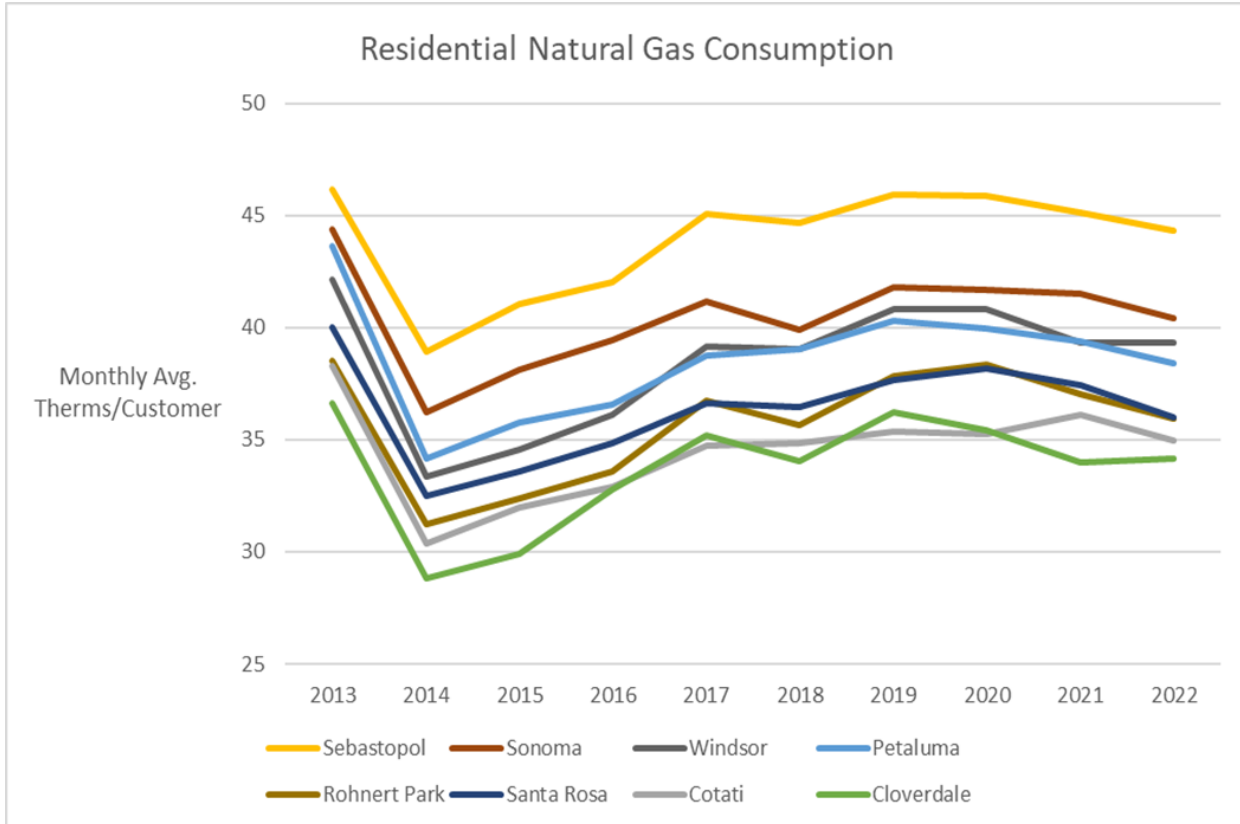
As can be seen from the chart on the following page, Sebastopol unfortunately leads the County in natural gas consumption in residential buildings for the average customer.

Natural gas, otherwise known as Methane, acts as a short term GHG. Though over a 100 year period, it is 34 times more impactful than CO<sub>2</sub>, it is over the short term where it participates most heavily to climate change. Over a 2 year horizon, methane is 120 times stronger as a GHG than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Studies have shown that the pipelines that deliver methane to buildings as well as the appliances that use it do leak considerably. The EPA estimates at wells 3.7% of the gas is emitted to the atmosphere. Recent reports estimate a further 1.3% is emitted from stove tops even when they are turned off representing a health risk.

Combustion of natural gas for space and water heating, cooking, clothes drying, and other end uses in residential and commercial buildings contributes about five percent of statewide oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emissions, and produces carbon monoxide (CO), ultrafine particles (UFPs, particles with diameters smaller than 0.1 micron) and fine particulate matter (PM2.5, particles with diameters smaller than 2.5 micron), and formaldehyde, which are harmful to human health and the environment. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu, Y., R. Connolly, T. Mathews, and Z. Wang. 2020. "Effects of Residential Gas Appliances on Indoor and Outdoor Air Quality and Public Health in California." UCLA Fielding School of Public Health Department of Environmental Health Sciences. Available at: <https://ucla.app.box.com/s/xyzt8jc1ixnetiv0269qe704wu0ihif7>

**STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The goals of the Sebastopol General Plan and the goals of the Sebastopol Climate Action Framework are potentially supported by changing the State of California changing the State Building Code through CALGreen to require electric construction in new buildings.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Sebastopol Climate Action Committee members and Sonoma Clean Power presented *Amplify West County* to Contractors and Industry Professionals to promote best practices.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action tonight.

**OPTIONS:**

1. Approve the issuance of a public letter written by the Climate Action Committee representing the City of Sebastopol that will be sent to State Agencies and the California Governor.

- 2. To deny the issuance of a public letter.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Draft Letter for Sebastopol Support of Zero-Emission New Construction Building Standards Statewide

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 4/29/24

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 4/29/24

The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 4/29/24

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget:  Yes  No  N/A

Account Code (f applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: **4/29/24**

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 4/29/24

**City Council**

Mayor Diana Rich  
Vice Mayor Stephen Zollman  
Councilmember Neysa Hinton  
Councilmember Sandra Maurer  
Councilmember Jill McLewis



**City of Sebastopol**

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**Letter to Governor Newsom for Support Zero-Emission New Construction Building Standards Statewide**

**May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1021 O St., Room 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support Zero-Emission New Construction Building Standards Statewide**

Dear Governor Newsom, Thank you for your leadership responding to climate change and long-standing partnership with local governments to help safeguard Californians against the worsening extremes of the climate crisis.

In light of your commitment to clean energy, we urge you to take swift action to ensure California can meet its climate goals by encouraging the adoption of a zero-emission building standard statewide through CALGreen.<sup>1</sup>

More than 75 municipalities in California have adopted some form of building electrification requirement through their local codes.<sup>2</sup> The best path forward in light of recent legal challenges to local electrification requirements is to follow the lead of local jurisdictions and pursue statewide implementation of common-sense clean emission measures for buildings.

We simply cannot wait any longer for a unified state standard that ensures our homes and buildings are powered by clean energy and efficient, electric appliances. California gave birth to the zero-emission buildings movement out of necessity. Homes and buildings are California's second largest source of climate pollution, and one of our state's most overlooked pollution problems. While as a state, we've made tremendous progress lowering emissions from other

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<sup>1</sup> A zero-emission standard could be based on either nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) or carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2021/07/californias-cities-lead-way-pollution-free-homes-and-buildings>

sectors, pollution from residential buildings has fallen only 3% in the past 20 years, while emissions from the commercial building sector have increased dramatically.

California cannot hit its 2030 climate targets without ambitious reductions from this sector – including the targets your administration has set.

While the California Energy Commission (CEC) has been pushing towards full electrification within their policy boundaries, they are equally limited. This delay in eliminating combustion in new construction is resulting in significant risk that fossil fuel use and infrastructure will continue to expand in California in coming years. We need to urgently align local and state policies around our clean energy goals and ensure everyone is rowing in the right direction. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is working diligently on statewide air quality implementation for later this decade, but we need continued local action and a statewide solution to advance building decarbonization work well ahead of that timeline to ensure market readiness.

**One such solution was cited in the 2022 CARB Scoping Plan, in which CARB explicitly notes the opportunity the State has to move forward with a new construction building decarbonization strategy through the CALGreen Code.** As stated:

“California also has an opportunity to adopt zero-emission building standards for new construction as part of the CALGreen Code. The CALGreen Code improves public health, safety, and general welfare through standards that promote sustainable design and construction of buildings. Based on the significant emission reduction potential, cost-savings, and public health benefits, California could adopt zero-emission building standards for new construction in CALGreen.”<sup>3</sup>

CalGreen is an important and appropriate vehicle to launch a statewide construction standard that will improve air quality and cut toxic pollution – indoors and out; that will benefit public safety by eliminating the practice of needlessly expanding fossil fuel infrastructure in new buildings; and that will benefit equity by ensuring new construction does not require extensive retrofits in the next 10-15 years in order to deliver on California’s carbon emission commitments.

Without your administration stepping in, local governments and Californians more generally will be stuck with polluting buildings and infrastructure we do not want or need – and many

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<sup>3</sup> CARB Scoping Plan, Appendix F <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022-sp-appendix-f-building-decarbonization.pdf> policy leadership.

municipalities will be forced to backtrack on progress cutting emissions from buildings, due to insufficient resources to fight frivolous and opportunistic lawsuits. Our state and climate do not have years to waste.

Taking action on CARB's recommendation to require zero-emission new construction will build on demonstrated local leadership in adopting electrification requirements. In addition, a zero-emission new construction requirement will enable local governments to continue to complement and reinforce the implementation timeline for regulating appliances in existing buildings adopted by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and CARB's stated intent to take similar action.

New York City and the State of New York provide precedent; California should act promptly both to meet our responsibility to present and future generations, and to regain California's climate policy leadership.<sup>4</sup> Please direct your agencies to take this action and create a mandatory zero-emission new construction requirement.

Furthermore, we ask you to investigate the studies on electromagnetic fields in an effort to create public health and safety exposure protocols.

Thank you,

Diana Gardner Rich  
Mayor  
**City of Sebastopol**

CC: Amy Tong, Chair, Building Standards Commission  
Gustavo Velasquez, Director, Department of Housing & Community Development  
Liane Randolph, Chair, California Air Resources Board  
David Hochschild, Chairman, California Energy Commission  
Andrew McAllister, Commissioner, California Energy Commission  
Yana Garcia, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency  
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency  
Lauren Sanchez, Senior Climate Advisor, Office of the Governor  
Grant Mack, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor  
Christine Hironaka, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor

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<sup>4</sup> <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4966519&GUID=714F1B3D-876F-4C4F-A1BC-A2849D60D55A&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=2317>