Dear Palo Alto City Council and Mayor Fine,

We all understand the tremendous stresses that the community, the nation and the planet are dealing with currently. While we’re struggling with these issues we also are seeing, in vivid terms, how they are related to an overarching issue that unites them (and us) all: the health of our planet.

Palo Alto has been a staunch supporter and leader in the civic environmental space, and we have residents who are committed to environmental issues. However we haven’t made enough progress to reduce our carbon footprint 80% by 2030 -- achieving this goal will take a major shift in our investments as we shift to low-carbon lifestyles.

We must eliminate fossil fuels from our city over time. Although Natural Gas (NG) was touted as the “clean” fossil fuel, the methane and toxic gasses that it emits have outsized health and safety issues (leaks, particulate matter, risk of asphyxiation, and fire risks in an earthquake). Methane is an 80% more potent greenhouse gas than CO2 (within a 20 year time period). In addition, we have not included the NG emitted during its extraction and transmission in our GHG inventory.

Please ensure that our plans are clear, actionable, measurable, and can be adjusted quickly to reflect on-the-ground results. In addition, establish year to year targets so we can track our progress to the 80/30 goal. Base the S/CAP on AECOM’s robust cost/benefit analysis of various carbon reduction options. Identify barriers to decarbonizing our City and then provide programs, incentives and process changes to remove those barriers. Finally, please continue to support the Utility’s efforts to electrify our homes, businesses and transportation.

To quote The Climate Mobilization movement, “We should treat the climate crisis the way the crisis of World War II was handled. Hardly anyone said after
Pearl Harbor, oh—it’s-too-hard-to-defeat-the-Axis, or it’s-too-expensive, or we-don’t-have-and-can’t-create-the-necessary-technology, or most-Americans-don’t-want-to-fight-a-war-so-we-can’t-do-so. The nation just got on with it even though it meant changing deep-seated habits, redirecting resources, and transforming much of the nation’s manufacturing sector. This wasn’t done haphazardly or on the cheap. The social, economic, technological, and management impacts were huge and long-lasting.”

Sincerely,
Susan Chamberlain, Debbie Mytels, Sandra Slater, Hilary Glann
for 350 Silicon Valley Palo Alto Climate Team
Comments: 2020 S/CAP Update - Agenda Item #1 June 16, 2020

2020 Sustainability and Climate Action Plan Update and Evaluate the 2020 S/CAP Potential Goals and Key Actions

Dear Mayor Fine and Palo Alto City Council Members,

I commend the City of Palo Alto and the City Council for work on Sustainability and Climate Action Plan goals, policies and actions.

The S/CAP is both urgent and critical. I strongly support a more focused work plan that results in critical outcomes. Without focused work and adjustments now the document will not serve our community well.

The pandemic illustrates how the lack of real plans, funding, and specific actions can delay life sustaining outcomes and cause irretrievable damage, suffering and death. The parallels between evolving pandemic impacts and lack of strategies, policies and actions are similar to deficiencies in addressing climate change and sustainability.

As noted by many community members, the goals and actions must include clear performance standards and measurable outcomes. Further, using clear metrics and measurable targets will enhance outcomes and be transparent.

I strongly endorse the three focus goals: Energy, Mobility and Electric Vehicles and the preliminary list of actions needed to achieve an overall reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Since GHG emissions are so critical we need to focus on the most ambitious goals — 80% below 1990 level by 2030. All of these goal areas relate to land use and housing policies that support compact, smart infill development that use innovative building materials and construction techniques.

The focus on changing transportation and mobility options are also important, including funding of transportation demand programs and transit in order to achieve climate action goals. A combination of local and regional funding will be needed. As the staff report notes, higher intervention has a link to higher certainty.

The goals and actions all support reduction of GHG. If we choose any time frame beyond 2030, we are simply not aggressive or serious enough to make substantial change.

I urge you to direct AECOM to identify as fully as possible the most aggressive measures to achieve goals with funding details for a focused work plan. Utilizing existing research and the multitude of S/CAP plans should inform their work and products.

We are not working in a vacuum — many Councils of Governments and US and international cities have created very ambitious plans and have experience. In my earlier comments I mentioned several cities and counties, such as San Mateo County, Santa Monica, Boulder, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver and Victoria, BC Canada as research and policy examples. There are many more.

The number and quality of the community comments about the S/CAP update illustrate the importance of this plan for the evolution and future of Palo Alto.

Gail A. Price
Barron Park
Palo Alto
Dear City Council,

I would like to commend the city for continuing on the S/CAP plans. I recognize that the current situation may shift resources to more urgent needs, but climate change remains to be an issue, one that if we see physical changes in our neighborhood may indicate we are too late to solve.

Our city has made policies like the 80x30 goal, but unfortunately in the past few years we have not made much progress. As such, we need to make up for lost time and act aggressively. As such, for the items the staff have ask you to consider, I would like to recommend you to choose:

- Set the GHG reduction goal for natural gas to be 80%
  - This would be inline with the 80x30 goal, and we need to recognize that natural gas use is about 40% of our current GHG
- Choose all Mobility goals
  - The other 50% of GHG is from transit, so we should do our best to move away from SOV, especially since the city has moved planning to use VMT over LOS. We will need a combination of carrots and sticks to make progress
- Choose all EV goals
  - While relative goals are better than absolute, both give approximately the same result here.
- Adopt all key actions
  - These are merely proposals for the consultant to conduct an impact report. We should have a broad set of items with data backing them to better decide which of them provides the most effective response, rather than killing them now without the data
  - Again, choose the most aggressive ones, such as the 100% residential phase-out of fossil fuel use. Inertia should not be a justification for non-action, especially when natural gas use is both dangerous to the environment and to us directly (e.g. San Bruno)

I hope the city council will continue to make Palo Alto a leader in environmental endeavors.

Sincerely,
Kevin Ma
Ventura Neighborhood Resident
Honorable Councilpeople:

The S/CAP goals relating to energy, electric vehicles, and water are areas under the purview of the UAC, on which I am a Commissioner, and as such, I’ve had many opportunities to study, reflect, and receive staff reports on those topics.

My thoughts regarding updated S/CAP goals:

Energy:

The overarching goal here is to reduce GHG emissions, by reducing the use of natural gas (“electrification”), and by increasing energy-use efficiency.

At present, we are not meeting our electrification goals, e.g. “the number of residents who have voluntarily replaced their water heaters is far lower than the goals”. Several proposed actions start with “increase awareness…”

Collectively, we are not doing nearly enough to articulate the problems with natural gas, and the need for electrification. When I joined the UAC last Summer, I had NO IDEA that natural gas use was any problem at all, and it would not surprise me to learn that many/most Palo Altans have yet to hear this message.

I propose:

Council and S/CAP make a definitive proclamation regarding the goal to eliminate the use of natural gas in Palo Alto, including:

- The eventual shutdown of our gas utility
- The elimination (or sharp curtailment) of new connections to the gas utility

This proclamation should be sent as an official notice to every Palo Alto home and building owner.

The recent changes to the Reach Code to require all-electric new residences are a good start, now Council/Staff must follow through to extend this to include new commercial buildings.

Mandate replacement of gas appliances wherever possible, including:

- Prohibit replacement and new installations of gas furnaces, hot-water-heaters, stoves/cooktops/ovens, and clothes-dryers.
- Require replacement of gas appliances on remolds
- Require replacement of gas appliances on sale of home
- Require electrification of houses/buildings in lieu of repairing/replacing existing gas lines.

The financial impact of electrification to home and building owners is exacerbated by the higher cost of electricity (than natural gas).

**CPAU must institute an “all-electric” rate plan,** to lower the cost of increased electricity usage resulting from electrification.

After the implementation of AMI/smart-meters, explore the possibility of reduced electricity rates for electrification-specific usage (EV charging, HVAC, hot-water-heating, etc)

Funding the replacement of existing gas appliances will be a challenge to home/building owners, CPAU, and the City. CPAU must develop and provide the capability to support “on-bill” financing of electrification improvements for homeowners.

Electrification projects may require upgrades of electric utility service and electric panel upgrades. Streamlining permitting, and on-bill financing would help homeowners.

In May, the UAC unanimously recommended that Council/CPAU institute the sale of CPAUs Bucket-1 RECs in order to raise as much as $17MM (over several years) for the electric utility.

It is my understanding that this proposal is scheduled for the August 17th Council meeting.

I strongly support this proposal, and if adopted, urge Council and CPAU to use this money to help fund the aforementioned electrification initiatives.

**Water:**

Increasing the use of recycled water is a key goal.

At the CPAU/system level, planned programs regarding water treatment and desalination will increase the supply of recycled water, however I don’t see any significant infrastructure plans for distribution of recycled water back into the City.

I am not aware of any effort to collect or use recycled or “gray water” at the household/building level. Segregating “gray water” from sewage would seemingly require infeasible/unrealistic changes to existing structures, however, we should explore requiring plumbing support for gray-water collection for new construction and “whole home” remodels.

**Electric Vehicles:**

It is my perception that there is little “lack of awareness” regarding the benefits of EVs among Palo Altans, so minimize additional spending and Staff time for this.

Removing obstacles to EV ownership/use remains an important goal, consider:

- Mandating/incentivizing EV chargers for rental housing
- Streamlining permitting of EV chargers
- Streamlining electric panel upgrades required for EV chargers
- Provide a lower electricity rate for EV charging

Explore penalizing the use and purchase of gas vehicles, perhaps institute a permit/tax/levy on (new?) gas-powered vehicles.
S/CAP As A Concept:

The challenges we face regarding climate change are enormous, involving a multitude of efforts over decades. Having a document that articulates and defines both our near and longer term goals is an incredibly valuable tool that we all can (and do!) use to evaluate and consider individual new proposals and initiatives. It is rare and amazing to have our goals and aspirations so well defined and documented, and I commend and thank all Palo Altans, Council, and Staff for their past and ongoing contributions, efforts, and commitment to this process.
Honorable Council Members,

Climate action planning looks pretty daunting given the number and range of proposed policy and program ideas staff has accumulated internally and from the community.

I would like to offer a few ideas for keeping our destination in mind as you direct staff to evaluate our options for reaching our goal of 80% GHG reduction by 2030. Two good questions come now for cities dealing with the climate crisis:

- What does the rapid, far reaching and unprecedented action we need look like?
- What steps get us there?

We know the answer to the first question is not “low Intervention” (early adopters, voluntary, education, rebates from Figure 1 in the staff report). These business-as-usual approaches won’t get anywhere near 80/30.

For the Energy area of the staff report (mostly about existing building electrification), I suggest that 80/30 means our city must have the following in place within a year or two:

- Policies that 100% require electrification of water and space heating upon the replacement of the gas device
  - Replace 7% of water heaters and 5% of space heaters that die each year, in line with 80/30
  - Redirects the would-be (stranded) gas investment into electric building and grid upgrades

- Programs that make it easy for building owners to follow electric-only rules
  - Remove the barriers to adoption (see below) so the electric policy is attractive
  - Accessible financing enables the program to help everyone and pay for itself
  - Temporary subsidies to kickstart a reliable local supply chain

We need a stepwise approach to get to there. That means plotting a policy and program path over time from our starting point of “low intervention” to our “higher Intervention” destination (Figure 1 in the report).

Staff provided a list of 18 “Energy” actions in their May report (link below). Most of what should be considered is there but there are gaps where other solid ideas must also be evaluated. For example, importantly, the list includes “on-bill financing” in item 10 and an electric water heating mandate in 8 but I do not see the corresponding space heating mandate. The Energy goals section seems to suggest lowering our goal below 80% for Energy but that seems largely inconsistent with an overall 80/30 intention. I think the action lists in the reports must be viewed as a work in progress and not a definite scope of work at this stage.

Thank you for the opportunity to help you to provide direction to staff regarding the next steps on our climate action plan.
Bret Andersen, Carbon Free Palo Alto

References:

May 28 Staff Report: https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=58649.63&BlobID=76860

June 16 Staff Report: https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=59513.75&BlobID=77028

Barriers to mass adoption of existing building electrification measures:

- High up-front costs
- Split incentives - renters vs owners
- Complexity of the buying process for retrofit solutions
- Emergency replacement practices that favor gas as business as usual
- Energy mispricing – rates that exclude carbon costs, fuel switching efficiency, time of use, etc