

Notes - Grassroots Institute (GRI) Climate Change Workgroup 3-13-21

At this meeting, two Fort Bragg City Council members Jessica Morsell-Haye and Tess Albin-Smith shared their priorities for Climate Change mitigation and discussed opportunities to improve climate change outcomes.

GRI workgroup members attending the meeting included - George Reinhardt, Jean Crosby, Carrie Durkee, Nancy Severy, Marcy Snyder, Peter McNamee and Garth Saalfield.

George Reinhardt facilitated the discussion and Peter McNamee took notes.

The meeting began with a brief introduction and overview of the GRI's Climate Change workgroup by George Reinhardt. George asked Fort Bragg city council members Jessica Morsell-Haye and Tess Albin-Smith to introduce themselves and start the discussion by sharing any pertinent thoughts on the city's approach to addressing climate change.

Tess Albin-Smith noted her 30 year history in Mendocino County and her work in with forestry industry as providing her with a keen awareness of the impacts of climate change on the economics, culture and well-being of coast residents.

Jessica Morsell-Haye spoke about her commitment to the community both as an owner/operator of a small business in downtown Fort Bragg and as a mother with a family in the community.

Both thanked the GRI for providing an opportunity to discuss the challenges of climate change and opportunities to improve the future for everyone on the coast.

Jessica Morsell-Haye specifically noted the importance of straightening carbon sequestration thru efforts such as the community gardens initiative. She also expressed her interest in developing a Fort Bragg micro-grid in order to provide greater electricity delivery reliability utilizing environmentally sustainable energy sources.

Tess Albin-Smith out that two years ago the city adopted a self sustainability goal and state law requires new construction projects to have a Photovoltaic (PV) component.

George Reinhardt commented that there is considerable new state and federal funding being awarded to local government for shovel ready economic recovery projects, and asked how these funds could be used to address climate change as well?

Garth Saalfield asked if the city has shovel ready projects targeted at installing PV on all city buildings?

Carrie Durkey asked if the city could use economic recovery funding to support a cooperative investment bank or public bank that could fund public, non-profit and for profit initiatives to stimulate the local economy and mitigate climate change problems.

Tess Albin-Smith commented that putting solar PV on the “Guest House” might be an excellent project both in terms of homeless assistance and helping address climate change issues.

Nancy Severy asked how can GRI help get climate change linked projects operational?

Jessica Morsell-Haye noted having grant money available isn’t enough. The city needs community involvement and adequate human resources to make projects successful. In one case, because the city didn’t have adequate human resources to make a project happen and it had to return grant funds. Staff with the right program expertise are hard to get and keep because program money is often limited term grant funding.

Tess Albin-Smith said that at this point the city hopes to get about \$1 million in American Rescue Act funding. There will be limitations on how the money can be spent, but it represents a big opportunity to address Fort Bragg’s needs.

Marcy Snyder recommended that the city develop a program to put PV on every roof in Fort Bragg. She estimated that if the city paid a hundred installers they could accomplish the task in two to three years. Marcy also recommend the city help convert as many cars as possible from gas to electricity.

George Reinhardt added that for those vehicles that can’t be converted to electricity, the city could encourage using ethanol use by supporting local conversion of green waste into ethanol fuel.

Garth Saalfield added that forestry byproducts can also be used to help sequester carbon thru the creation of bio-char.

Tess Albin-Smith commented that the Mendocino Council Of Governments (MCOG) has already recognized the importance of converting to electric vehicles and the need to expand the number of charging stations locally.

Carrie Durkey asked how we can enlist the expertise in the community to assist the city with the logistics of supporting successful climate change programs. Could we better utilize our community college by creating internship programs to put local students to work on such projects?

Nancy Severy asked if the city has guidelines for addressing climate change challenges, such as goals for sequestration of carbon?

Jessica Morsell-Haye responded that the city was in the process of updating its design guidelines and that climate change mitigation could be an important part of that effort. For example promoting green space and alternatives to paved parking lots.

Carrie Durkey and George Reinhardt stressed the need to consider water requirements as part of the city's climate change challenge. They noted the increased threat of droughts as well as the need to reduce the energy needs to provide clean drinking water, treat septic water and handle storm waters.

In rapping up the discussion, both Jessica and Tess thank GRI for sponsoring this opportunity to discuss climate change challenges. They hoped that discussions like this would help to achieve a better understanding and clarity in the community of where the city needs to go in regard to climate change. They specifically asked that GRI think about the opportunities that American Rescue Act funding offers the city and make a set of recommendations for specific projects the city should consider going forward.

They also stressed that time is of the essence, since cities and counties are already ramping up plans for how to allocate these new funds and so community immediate input is vital.

The GRI climate change workgroup agreed and decided to spend its next meeting identifying a list of climate change projects to submit to the Fort Bragg city council as priority projects for new state and federal funded programs. The workgroup will meet Saturday March 20 at 10am via the GRI zoom meeting.