

A Path Off "Natural" Gas

This is a plan to raise awareness of the role methane plays in climate change and begin to recruit public support and action for city-wide reduction in natural gas (methane) consumption.

Ashland's built environment has two main energy sources, 'Natural Gas' (methane, primarily) and BPA electricity. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas. In the first 10 years that a quantity of methane is in the atmosphere, it is 100+ times as effective at trapping heat as CO₂. Over time the heat trapping effect wanes. Averaged over 100 years, methane traps 25 times as much heat as CO₂.

Methane is imported from distant fracking wells via pipelines, and all pipelines leak. Even a small leak of methane (3%) from the site of extraction to the burner negates any superiority methane might otherwise have for the climate over coal. Estimates of leakage are above 3%. In addition, methane storage sites are prone to massive leaks.

The continued use of methane is incompatible with a stable environment. Hydroelectric power, by contrast, contributes much less to global warming, and it would be prudent to convert our power supply to all hydroelectric, or electric from some other fuel source than fossil fuel, such as wind or solar.

There is a widespread lack of awareness nationwide, and also among residents of Ashland about this issue. Therefore, engaging and raising awareness of the residents of Ashland is a necessary first step in the process of phasing out the use of methane (#1 below). It can be done in parallel with detailed research on the gas equipment in the community (#2 below), with information fed back into the community engagement campaign.

We also need to think through and be sensitive to the City's relationship with its franchisee, Avista. What are the terms of this relationship, and who in the City manages it? How might Avista play a role to facilitate a smooth transition?

1. Engage the community and raise awareness of the issue. Ideally, this should be done in collaboration with CCOC, SOCAN/Ashland Climate Action Project, and others (who?). This needs to be a full-scale engagement strategy carried out over many (six?) months and via multiple channels. Who are key influencers in our community? How have other cities of our size approached this issue? Among the issues to discuss:
 - a. What's the problem with "natural" gas (this should include both climate and health impacts)? Where does gas in Ashland come from? What's the difference between fracked "fossil" gas and "renewable" landfill gas?
 - i. SOCAN/Ashland Climate Action Project will offer a first forum on March 25 ("Natural Gas: the Fossil Fuel You Came to Love--Seduced by Methane, Now Plagued by Heartburn")
 - ii. This should be widely advertised and involve as many other local organizations as possible that can provide access to other audiences
 - b. What alternatives to gas are technically feasible?
 - c. What is the cost difference?

- i. Purchase and installation
 - ii. Annual operating cost
- 2. Pull together a natural gas inventory for Ashland
 - a. Stu currently reports annually on natural gas consumption. He reports the City and community data separately. The City has quarterly data from the City's franchisee, Avista. Does the City have more disaggregated consumption data? Reporting needs to be accompanied by an "explainer" making the connection to more widely familiar GHG metrics.
 - b. Who is using gas and how much? Does the City have this data or does it all reside with Avista? This information would be useful for regular reporting and community engagement.
 - i. Ideally, we could report total consumption by residential, commercial, industrial, government (also listing City of Ashland consumption separately, including parks and recreation).
 - ii. Who are Ashland's largest gas consumers? What percentage of Ashland's total do they represent? How are they already thinking about the problem? What's the best way to engage them individually and collectively?
 - c. Identify age and location of gas-fueled equipment. This information would be useful for identifying opportunities to retire equipment as it ages.
 - i. At least furnaces and water heaters. Cookstoves and fireplace inserts may be more difficult.
 - ii. It would be good to include fuel oil and propane equipment, if possible. The 2015 GHG inventory only estimated Ashland's use from state-level per capita data and Ashland's annual population.
 - iii. What City records and other sources could inform this effort?
 - 1. Permits? How complete and accessible are City data on residential and commercial gas equipment?
 - d. What do Ashland's architects, developers, contractors, installers think? What has been their experience? How best to engage them in the initiative?
- 3. Phasing out gas equipment. Basic prioritization: (1) avoid installation of gas equipment in all new construction; (2) as gas equipment approaches retirement, replace it with electric; and (3) promote early retirement of gas equipment and replacement with electric whenever possible.
 - a. What policy levers are within the City's authority? Where does the state need to act?
 - b. City of Ashland operations (including parks and recreation) should lead the way
 - i. Can there be an immediate decision that the City will not procure any new gas equipment?
 - ii. Prepare an inventory of the age and condition of all the City's current gas equipment and develop a retirement plan. Over what timeframe?
 - c. Government (SOU, ASD, Asante Community Hospital). Who else? How are they thinking about the issue? What is the best approach?
 - d. Commercial establishments
 - i. Begin discussions with the biggest consumers (who are they?)

- ii. Engage the Chamber of Commerce and other small business advocates
 - iii. Develop easy-to-follow protocols for gas equipment retirement plans, including financial options
- e. Residential
 - i. What resources can be brought to bear to facilitate electrification?
 - ii. A strong focus on social equity is critical. Low income households who cannot afford to electrify early may face escalating operating costs if they remain on gas over the long term.
- f. Funding
 - i. Can we estimate the value of the total stock of gas equipment that would need to be replaced over the next 10-20 years?
 - ii. What financing sources are available?
 - iii. Is there interest in expanding the City's offsets program? Would Ashlanders want to offset their unavoidable emissions by paying into a fund that would match the City's cash incentives for replacing gas equipment? The sustained GHG emissions reduction achieved in that way would be additional and easy to calculate. See Missoula's Footprint Fund as an example: <https://www.missoulafootprintfund.org/>