

Ambitious climate plan moves forward

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Carrboro Commons

When people think about Carrboro, a lot of people and places come to mind. Now, the town is working hard to ensure a certain color comes to mind: green.

“If there is any place that can adopt the radical changes that climate change calls for today, I think that it’s Carrboro,” said Alderman Sammy Slade. “And we can hopefully be a model for other towns.”

On April 12, the Board of Aldermen voted for the Community Climate Action Plan to go to public hearing at the end of this month; a plan that has been in the works for the last 18 months.

In 2009, the Board of Aldermen passed a resolution committing Carrboro to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and its overall carbon footprint. Over the last few years, the town has made a lot of progress.

First, the town joined the Cities for Climate Protection, a campaign that aims to facilitate emissions reduction through local government, in over 1000 cities and towns across the world.

Carrboro then created its own task force, consisting of five volunteer members and two Board of Aldermen liaisons, to draft a Community Climate Action Plan.

“We’re always looking for ways to reduce greenhouse emissions, not just through town government, but through the public,” said Mayor Lydia Lavelle. “The task force gave us really good statistics and information on how to do that.”

Rob Pinder, founder of NextClimate, a non-profit organization that empowers communities to take action on climate change, volunteered to be in the task force.

In the initial stages, the task force was given an emissions inventory, which showed the contributions of greenhouse emissions from different sectors of the town. “We saw that the town itself, the police department and fire department, was emitting only a very small percentage of the total greenhouse gases,” said Pinder. “We quickly realized that we needed to focus on how to engage the community to take action against climate change.”

The task force was broken up into groups to tackle the different environmental issues that face the community, said Pinder.

“We focused on two charges. One was



The Board of Aldermen take in a Community Climate Action Plan presentation, ultimately deciding to send it to public hearing on April 26. (Staff photo by Kelley Hamill)

reducing the overall greenhouse emissions,” said Pinder. “The second was making Carrboro a more resilient community. Climate change is already underway, but how do we protect the community?”

All the information has been put into a draft, which was presented to the Board of Aldermen, the Carrboro Advisory Boards and is available online for public input, said Pinder.

The draft recommends that Carrboro should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent, by 2025.

“The plan puts forward a rather ambitious target,” said Pinder. “Right now we’re already at 2.5 percent reduction per year.”

The draft also suggests that reducing greenhouse gas

emissions will save the town money, create new jobs, improve the air quality and public health, as well as the forests and streams.

Bruce Sinclair, chair of the Environmental Advisory Board, believes the goal is attainable.

“The issue is that a comprehensive holistic approach has not been developed, yet,” said Sinclair.

Other suggestions in the draft include increasing bicycling, pedestrian and carpooling as modes of transit, expanding local environmental protection and restoration efforts, and increasing efforts to support

residents with limited opportunities for renewable energy.

While it has been generally well-received, some components of the draft touched on controversial topics, like the Urban Archery Deer Program, which helps combat the deer herds eating native plants, said Slade.

“In Carrboro there are a lot of vegans and vegetarians that spoke out against the urban archery program,” said Slade. “The task force changed that recommendation and is looking into alternatives.”

In addition, the Bolin Creek Greenway proposal, which would connect north and south Carrboro, received a lot of attention from residents, said Slade.

“It was controversial because there are a lot of people who would like to maintain the status quo,” said Slade. “The Board of Aldermen pulled the Bolin Creek Greenway out of the draft, with the intention of looking at it separately. We didn’t want the whole draft to be overshadowed by this.”

The Board of Aldermen collectively voiced its concern about reaching all members of the community.

“It’s going to be really important for the community to buy in. All aspects of our community need to learn about it and hear about it,” said Lavelle. “You can put it all in an email and on the website, and a lot of people see that, but a lot of people don’t.”

The public hearing is scheduled for April 26 at 7:30. Until then, residents can give input via an online survey.

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Sammy Slade