



POINT REYES LIGHT

Activating the Green New Deal: A community conversation

By John Montgomery
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“The most radical thing any of us can do at this time is to be fully present to what is happening in the world.” — Johanna Macy

Most people in West Marin believe that climate change poses a major existential threat to humanity. Around here, the science of climate change is common knowledge and generally not in dispute. Our global, fossil-fuel and carbon-based economic system generates so much carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that earth’s climate may become so hot and unstable that civilization and the biosphere could collapse during our lifetimes. Despite the magnitude of this threat, our current administration in Washington spends precious time and resources denying the reality of climate change, rather than working toward solutions.

In February, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey introduced a nonbinding resolution to address climate change. The resolution outlines what is commonly known as the Green New Deal, an ambitious plan to combat climate change. The name echoes President Roosevelt’s New Deal to battle the Great Depression and signals the urgency and magnitude of the problem. Sixty House members and several Democratic presidential candidates have endorsed the plan as climate change has emerged as a major issue in the 2020 elections.

The goal of the Green New Deal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and to shift to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. By doing this, the United States would fulfill its contribution to limit global warming by less than 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius) by 2100, as targeted in the Paris Agreement.

To create a carbon-neutral economy, the Green New Deal would shift all power generation to renewable sources of energy, such as wind and solar. The plan would stimulate the nation’s infrastructure, public-transit, manufacturing and agricultural industries to become carbon-neutral. The plan also contemplates upgrading all of the nation’s buildings for energy efficiency and investments in sequestering greenhouse gases. By achieving these goals, the U.S. would become an international leader in sustainable technology that could help other countries transition to carbon-neutral economies.

The Green New Deal also boldly aspires to address some major social issues. For example, it advocates for universal health care and universal basic income, a government guarantee that each citizen receives a minimum income to cover the cost of living.

When discussing the Green New Deal, it is important to be clear about which version you are talking about. Several presidential candidates have proposed their own versions of the Green New Deal, and some cities, such as Los Angeles, have adopted their own version. A Green New Deal was first proposed by Thomas Friedman in a New York Times editorial a decade ago, and was championed by climate activist Bill McKibben in 2016, advising Bernie Sanders’s and the Democratic National Committee’s platforms.

Whether you agree with all of the Green New Deal, its grand vision has succeeded in pressing the need for climate action. Now is the time for tangible legislation and action that will quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

If you are interested in learning more about the Green New Deal and what we can do to activate it, West Marin Standing Together and the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin have organized a community forum from 4 to 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 24 at the Dance Palace in Point Reyes Station. The panel will include Jonathan Marshall, a journalist and volunteer with the Citizens' Climate Lobby; David Kunhardt, a solar developer; Cheyenne Clarke, a student activist; Claire Seda, a local naturalist; and myself. Morgan Patton, executive director of the E.A.C., will moderate the event, which will start at 3:45 p.m. with inspirational music by Sky Nelson-Isaacs.

Bing Gong, an organizer with West Marin Standing Together, hopes it will be the first of a series of community conversations on the climate crisis in West Marin. "We in West Marin may not be able to prevent the unraveling of our global civilization, but we can aspire to make a profound difference locally, coming together as a community to become an island of sanity and compassion," he said. "Can we co-create a vision of 'deep community,' and what would that look like?"

Future community conversations could focus on local concerns in West Marin and Tomales Bay, such as sea-level rise, ocean acidification, impacts on oyster cultivation and forest fires. Another conversation could be concerned with the emotional and psychological impacts of the climate crisis: our fears, grief, apathy, despair and depression. How can we survive and be resilient, emotionally and spiritually?

John Montgomery is an artist and attorney who was instrumental in drafting the law creating California's benefit corporations, which are committed to the health of people and planet in addition to generating profits. He lives in Inverness Park. For more information about the forum on Aug. 24 and future events, call Bing at (415) 766.1439.