



POINT REYES LIGHT

Community conversation brainstormed solutions to the climate crisis

By Mairi Pileggi
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Two weeks after the Kincadee fire and the PG&E shutoff, around 100 people gathered in Point Reyes Station to learn about the climate emergency and brainstorm local climate actions. The Nov. 10 event marked the second in a five-part series of community conversations on the climate crisis.

Despite the stress and fear of the past weeks, Ellie Cohen, our keynote speaker and the director of The Climate Center, delivered a hopeful, if sobering message.

“We are at a tipping point for the future of life on our planet,” she said. “The more carbon we produce, the worse the impacts. We can still make a difference. But California needs to lead collective action now.”

In a comprehensive overview of the current crisis, Cohen outlined how our human activities have pushed beyond safe limits for the Earth’s stability and well-being. Citing an increase in carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions and a rise in global temperatures that have contributed to warmer oceans, precipitated arctic ice melt and permafrost warming, and intensified weather events, Cohen challenged the audience to act personally and collectively now.

“We need to cut our carbon emissions by 45 percent by 2030 if we want to meet the 1.5°C goal recommended by the International Panel on Climate Change,” she said. “And we need to balance carbon emissions with carbon removal.”

Cohen offered examples of countries working on successful climate mitigation and adaptation actions globally—including Finland, Uruguay, and Denmark—and here in California, in Santa Monica and Marin.

Then she sketched our state’s greenhouse gas emissions picture. According to the most recent California Air Resources Board data, the transportation sector ranks highest, at 41 percent, followed by the industrial sector (24 percent), electricity (9 percent), agriculture (8 percent), residential (7 percent), electricity imports (6 percent) and commercial (5 percent).

In response to climate change impacts, the air resources board notes that California lawmakers have been working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions levels through S.B. 32, reduce short-lived climate pollutants through S.B. 1383, and achieve 100 percent renewable energy over the next 15 years, through S.B. 100.

But Cohen thinks we need to tighten our timeline and aim for 2025 goals. “We need to enact the bold policies required by science to be on track for a safe climate by 2030 and to secure a vibrant, equitable, and healthy future for all,” she said.

To decarbonize California, Cohen said, “we need to achieve 80 percent below 1990 levels and carbon neutrality by 2030 and reach net negative emission by 2035.” She outlined five areas we must address: clean, local and equitable power and storage; sustainable mobility; healthy lands and waters; climate-safe communities; and green finance.

In Marin County, transportation tops the emissions list (53 percent), followed by residential energy (22 percent), non-residential energy (11 percent), waste (5 percent), off-road vehicles and equipment (1 percent) and water and wastewater (less than 1 percent).

Community activism is key if we are to meet our goals, Cohen said. We can talk with our neighbors about the personal impacts of transportation, including the S.U.V.s so popular in Marin. But we need to organize to effect structural change.

“We need to build an unprecedented cross-sectoral coalition of climate activists who exert political power. They need to identify and advocate for policy solutions and identify and elect policy makers who advocate and vote for policy solutions,” Cohen said.

Responding to the need to support local climate action, our county instituted Drawdown Marin, a solutions-focused initiative working to “reduce GHG emission countywide and to prepare for climate change impacts.”

Alex Porteshawver, senior sustainability coordinator, outlined the six areas the county is focusing on: renewable energy, transportation, buildings and infrastructure, local food and waste, carbon sequestration, and climate resilient communities.

Inspired by the speakers, attendees broke into small groups, sharing what they care about in West Marin, their concerns about climate change, and what they personally want to do to address the crisis. The room was buzzing as people brainstormed ideas about how West Marin should address climate change collectively and individually. A river of post-it notes flowed out of the session.

These ideas will be collated and shared with the community at the next Community Conversation on the Climate Crisis, which will take place in February 2020. For more information, contact Bing Gong at binggong@sonic.net (<mailto:binggong@sonic.net>) or Morgan Patton at morgan@eacmarin.org (<mailto:morgan@eacmarin.org>).

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