

ATHERTON ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE REACH CODE PUBLIC COMMENT

As presented by Committee Member Stacy Miles Holland

The Environmental Programs Committee urges the City Council to adopt the reach code to ban natural gas in new builds and renovations.

[Global scientists agree](#): the window is rapidly closing to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate change. We have [ten years to cut global warming pollution in half](#) in order to be on the pathway to avoiding climate disaster. We do not have time for half measures like “electric preferred” or “electric required.” The only way to achieve Atherton’s climate goals is to ban natural gas in new builds and renovations.

The Atherton Climate Action Plan adopted in 2016 set the goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 49 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. **Given that 40% of Atherton’s emissions come from residential buildings, there is no path to hitting that goal without reducing the number of gas appliances in Town.** It is our second highest producer behind cars. If Atherton is going to take GHG reductions seriously, we need to get serious about reach codes.

The easiest first step: avoid adding new gas infrastructure to the Town. This reach code applies to new builds and renovations. These residents will already be buying new appliances and undertaking construction. This would not be an undue burden.

On the contrary, allowing residents to invest resources to build gas infrastructure in their homes would be irresponsible. The future is clear: home electrification is inevitable.

- California has set the goal of total, economy-wide decarbonization by 2045. State law has set the target of reducing building emissions by 40% by 2030. To achieve that, California will need to institute a state-wide gas ban and conduct a [massive building retrofit effort](#).
- The [California Public Utilities Commission just adopted Building Efficiency Standards](#) that make it more expensive and cumbersome to install gas in new buildings as they inch their way towards a gas ban.
- Methane, the key component of natural gas, delivers 80x more warming impact than carbon dioxide. The [US just forged a global alliance](#) that pledged to reduce methane emissions by 30% before 2030.
- The Biden administration's climate plan calls for government incentives that would encourage people to switch from residential gas to all-electric. The EPA and Energy Department [just removed gas appliances from the EnergyStar program](#).
- [A recent study revealed](#): gas appliances in residential and commercial buildings collectively emit as much planet-warming CO2 as the nation’s gas-fired power plants. As the impact of gas appliances on climate change becomes more clear, efforts to eliminate them will become more aggressive.

We should prepare Atherton residents for a gas-free future. It would be easier and less expensive for residents to electrify their new construction than to retrofit their homes later.

Beyond its impact on climate, there are a number of other benefits to banning natural gas. Here are four:

1. **Natural gas inside the home is unhealthy.** Research has shown that gas appliances can generate [unsafe levels of indoor air pollution](#). Burning gas emits pollutants that can [cause or worsen respiratory](#)

[illnesses](#). Children living in homes with gas stoves are [42 percent more likely to suffer asthma](#). Eliminating gas from the home will also massively reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Gas lines are vulnerable to earthquakes: [one in four fires after an earthquake stem from natural gas leaks](#).

2. **Green features add home value.** [Studies](#) have shown that green homes sell faster and for more money than homes without. Green features are among the [top “must-haves” for today’s home buyer](#).
3. **Home electrification will save residents money.** Gas line infrastructure is expensive and time-consuming to install, and gas appliances are more expensive than electric. All-electric buildings are faster to design, permit and build. The code is easier for building staff to apply, and it’s easier for everyone to understand. The [cost of natural gas is increasing](#). Meanwhile, the efficiency of electric appliances means utility bills are often lower, and the upfront cost can be offset by a number of rebates.
4. **Modern electric appliances are better than gas appliances.** Unlike furnaces, an air heat pump system can both heat and cool the house. [Induction stoves and ovens outperform gas](#) by all metrics. Heat pump water heaters are 3x more efficient than their gas counterparts and have the lowest running costs. These are cutting edge appliances using proven technologies.

Once this reach code is adopted, the public will need to be educated on the benefits of home electrification. The EPC is ready to undertake a proactive community outreach program. Some initial ideas:

1. We recently rewrote the sustainability portion of the Atherton Town website to include rebate information, a green building resource guide, tips for energy efficiency and water conservation. When it goes live, we should invest marketing resources to make sure our residents know about it.
2. We can partner with the Building Department to educate both contractors and residents. We have started working on a Green Building Checklist as a resource on our website. Perhaps we can incorporate it into the permitting process and have it freely available at the Building Help Desk. We can arrange for experts to host education series during the Developers Roundtables. We can also create visual infographic posters to hang in the office.
3. There are likely many incredible all-electric or green buildings within Atherton. We should spotlight them through our communication channels like the Athertonian and our social media. We could also showcase them at our Earth Day celebration or arrange for special green Atherton house tour events.
4. We should add a sustainability feature to every issue of the Athertonian. We could also print the Green Building Checklist in an upcoming issue of the Athertonian.

Climate change is real, and it’s caused by fossil fuels, including natural gas. Atherton is already feeling the effects: drought, wildfires and record-breaking heat waves are commonplace. People want to take climate action. Polls show that there is broad bipartisan support for doing more to address climate change. There are a number of building codes that limit residents’ personal choices in order to improve the overall quality of life for the Atherton community. Climate change is an existential threat to our quality of life.

Strict reach codes have been adopted by all of our neighboring cities. Atherton is falling behind. It’s time for bold leadership from the Atherton City Council. The Environmental Programs Committee urges you to adopt the natural gas ban reach code. It’s the right thing to do - for Atherton and for the planet.