

Town Crier submission from Environmental Commission

Dear Editor,

Recent articles and letters to the editor have referenced the Environmental Commission's work on reach codes. As the commission conducts this work we want residents to have accurate information about our recommendations.

Every three years California adopts a new building code that sets the minimum standards for new construction. Local municipalities can adopt codes that are stricter or "reach" beyond this base code. Los Altos' current reach code requires new construction to be all-electric with exceptions for cooking and fireplaces. Beginning in January of 2023, Los Altos' current reach code will be replaced by the new 2022 California Code, which requires building electrification to a lesser extent. Like many other local cities, Los Altos is considering adopting new reach codes to go into effect in January.

Nearly forty percent of Los Altos' greenhouse gas emissions come from natural gas use in buildings. Natural gas is mostly methane gas, a powerful greenhouse gas that is twenty times more potent than carbon dioxide and which is exacerbating the climate crisis we are already experiencing. New research also indicates that natural gas appliances release emissions that are even more harmful to the health of building occupants than previously recognized. To make progress on Los Altos' Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) goal of carbon neutrality by 2035 we must address these emissions through building electrification. Building electrification also helps prepare our buildings to align with future state laws and the increasing demand for electric vehicle charging.

The Environmental Commission has been evaluating model codes developed by three community energy providers (SVCE, PCE and EBCE). In addition to the outreach and survey on reach codes we conducted in 2020, the commission held two public workshops in June and presented at a city council study session to explain the model codes and receive feedback. At its August meeting the commission developed recommended reach codes based on that research and input and we are now seeking community input on our recommendations via a survey. The commission will present its recommendations and survey outreach to the city council who will then decide whether to adopt or revise the codes, or to forgo implementation. The survey is available on the Environmental Commission website.

The Environmental Commission's recommended reach codes would require all-electric new construction as detailed below:

- Requires all-electric appliances in newly constructed buildings (space & water heating, cooking, fireplaces, clothes drying) and additional EV-charging infrastructure.
- Applies to buildings when 50% or more of framing or foundation is modified or when 750 or more square feet are added.
- Prohibits extending gas service lines to outdoor appliances and equipment (e.g. pool and spa equipment)
- DOES NOT APPLY TO EXISTING BUILDING ALTERATION OR APPLIANCE REPLACEMENT. This has been the subject of resident feedback and concern about the cost of replacing gas appliances with electric ones when they fail or are replaced. The commission is not currently recommending any requirement for electrification in these cases but will seek direction from the council on investigating future action on existing building electrification. The council has already indicated an interest in exploring policies and funding programs to help offset such costs to residents.
- DOES NOT INCLUDE A NATURAL GAS “SHUT-OFF” DATE.

The survey can be found on the Environmental Commission home page as well as the reach code webpage which includes information and resources that may be helpful to residents in understanding the various aspects of this topic (from commission webpage at [losaltosca.gov/environmentalcommission](https://losaltosca.gov/environmentalcommission) select ‘Reach Codes’). There is also a plethora of information about the various aspects of home electrification on BayRen.org.

The Environmental Commission thanks residents for taking time to review and comment on our recommendations.