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The High Schooler's Guide to Saving The Planet, One City at a Time: *Ashland Youth For Electrification* *A Case Study*



Rogue
Climate



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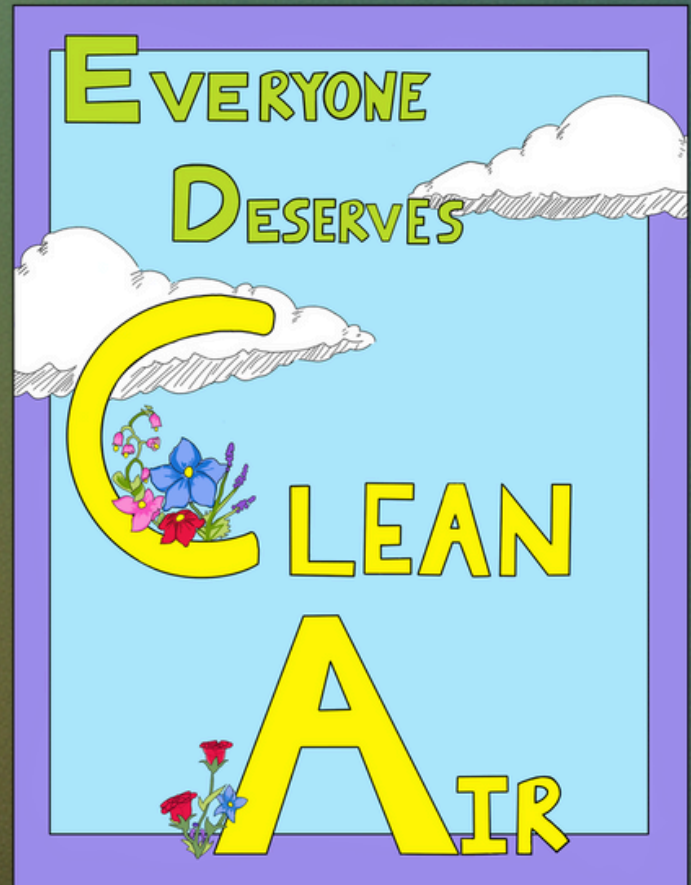


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Introduction

Ashland Youth for Electrification

The Ashland Youth for Electrification Campaign is a youth-led campaign that was launched in 2023 to move Ashland towards its climate goals and improve health, air quality and energy affordability for community members. The youth-led team Rogue Climate Action Team (RCAT) launched the campaign to incentivize building new homes all-electric in the city of Ashland, Oregon. The campaign focused on improving air pollution in Oregon by eliminating harmful fossil fuel gases which cause negative health effects in the community and worsen the impact of wildfires. After campaigning for over 2 years, we won a unanimous vote by Ashland City Council to pass the Climate Impact Pollution Fee. This ordinance places a fee on gas appliances in new residential construction, and directs the revenue to the City of Ashland's low-income energy assistance program.



Design by Freya Town
RCAT Member

Pre-victory photo before Ashland City Council's final vote to pass the Climate Impact Pollution Fee



Photograph by Gabriel Ramirez

Rogue Climate Action Team



RCAT is a youth-led organizing group of Rogue Climate aimed at achieving climate justice, clean air, and a livable future in Southern Oregon. RCAT is involved in lobbying for climate bills, doing outreach, engaging with the community, and growing youth organizing skills with a summer and winter internship.

Ashland Youth for Electrification Campaign



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The Ashland Youth for Electrification Campaign launched publicly in 2023 when 400 students walked out of Ashland High School. The students then held a rally demanding Ashland City Council act in accountability with the Climate and Clean Energy Action Plan (CEAP) passed in 2017, and that the city take Rogue Valley youth seriously in their demands for climate justice. The CEAP outlined the city's goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, but Ashland's policy-makers were not following through. As a result, the youth of Ashland took a stand and put forward a policy incentivizing all-electric new home construction. This policy would encourage new homes to be built with modern, energy-efficient electric appliances, which lowers both energy bills and costs of building.

The Carbon Pollution Impact Fee Ordinance was created through the hard work of Ashland Youth over more than two years; youth gave testimony, held rallies, organized walk-outs, and spoke with the public as well as City Council. Despite public support, the policy faced hesitation and opposition within the Climate and Environment Policy Advisory Committee (CEPAC) and Ashland City Council. The policy was also stalled due to the federal decision striking down Berkeley, California's gas ban. Against the late game opposition, we won. On February 18th, 2025, we were able to present a scroll of 1,100 signatures and 40 in-person testimonials to Ashland City Council, resulting in a unanimous vote to pass the policy. The Carbon Pollution Fee Ordinance is set to go into effect in January of 2026.

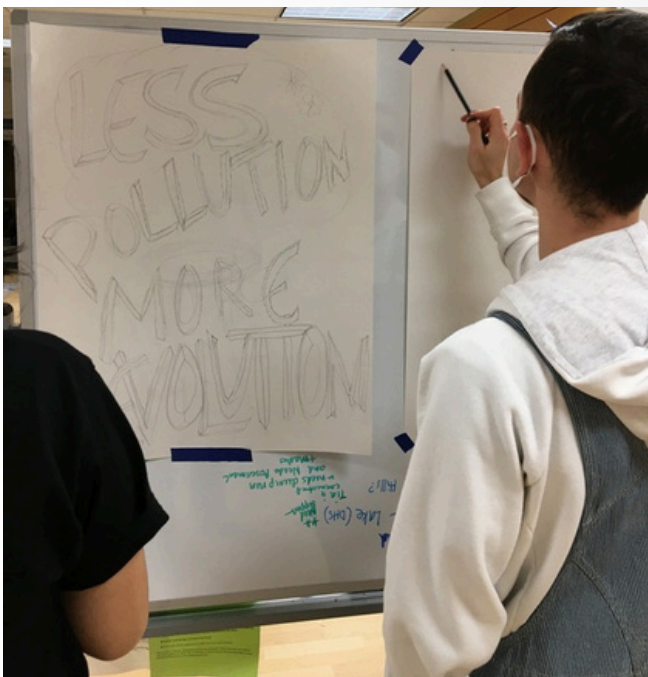


Campaign Preperation



Choosing the Campaign

Eugene, Oregon passed an electrification ordinance in 2023 that banned gas hookups in new residential construction. This inspired the RCAT team to propose something similar in the city of Ashland. After researching Eugene's ordinance and similar policy in other states such as New York and Berkeley, the team decided to launch a campaign focused on electrification.



RCAT members began reaching out to local partners for support and questions and also spoke to Ashland developers about electric homes. Te Maia Wiki, 17 at the time of the campaign launch, said that the breakthrough was learning that most housing projects were already built all electric, both for cost efficiency and for the safety of their workers. Local developers also stated that most low income housing projects are made fully electric because tenants prefer a safer, less polluting option due to health concerns brought on by gas. After addressing questions and concerns from the community, the team decided to move forward on an electrification ordinance.

The Walkout



In March of 2023, 400+ students from Ashland High School and other local high schools walked out and held a rally in Ashland, where hundreds of community members joined for speakers, music, and chants to demand climate action in Ashland.

Students then gathered with allies at the Ashland City Council chambers, demanding they pass an ordinance to ban gas hookups on new construction in Ashland. RCAT brought a draft ordinance modeled after Eugene for the Council to adopt. The walkout was an effective introduction to the campaign while also showcasing the public support behind it. Because of our action, the City Council directed Ashland's Climate & Environment Policy Advisory Committee (CEPAC) to explore the policy.



Adapting

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The initial ordinance was designed based on ordinances passed in Berkeley, CA and Eugene, OR that banned gas hookups in new construction. But in April of 2023, the 9th circuit court overturned Berkeley's ordinance, following a lawsuit from the California Restaurant Association, eliminating an easy solution for the city of Ashland. We began to brainstorm a new approach to electrification in Ashland.

After collectively regrouping, we collaborated with Ashland's CEPAC and the Green Energy Institute to identify other legal pathways to transition away from gas. Following dozens of stakeholder interviews and two community listening events, we turned out over 100 comments to the City of Ashland encouraging them to advance a bold policy approach that would prioritize benefits for low-income and BIPOC community members. We got two RCAT leaders appointed to CEPAC, and organized inside of that committee to build alignment.

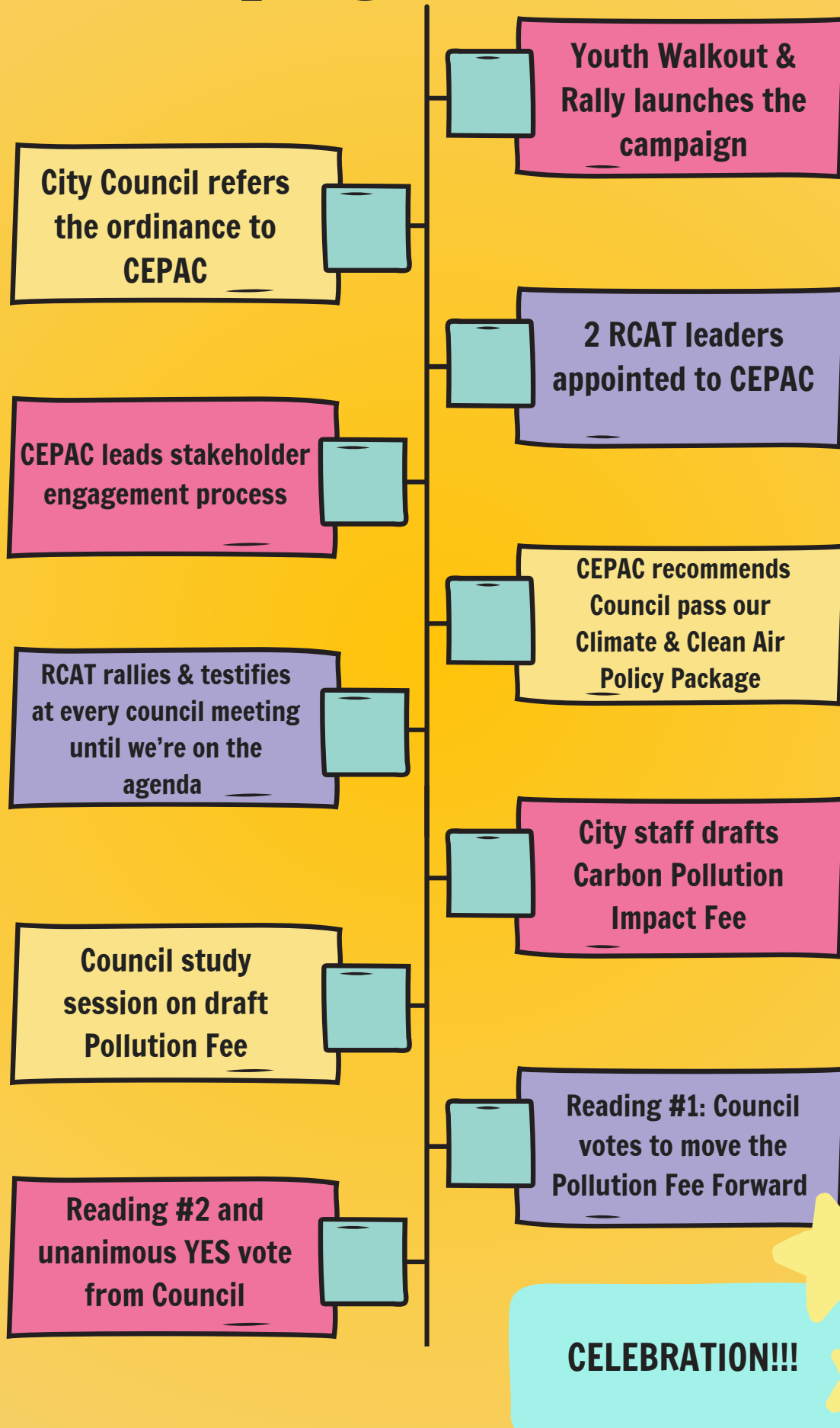
After a year of organizing, we had our first mid-term victory when CEPAC voted to refer four main policy demands to the City Council, what we called **the Climate and Clean Air Policy Package:**

1. **Low NOx Emissions Standard:** would limit the amount of pollutants emitted
2. **Pollution Fee:** This would charge a fee for installing gas appliances in newly constructed homes, based on the social cost of carbon for the emissions of that appliance. All revenue from the fee would go into a low income energy assistance program.
3. **Ban on gas pipelines on public right of ways:** This would revise the city's franchise agreement with Avista, the gas utility.
4. **Resolution to transition existing homes, commercial and industrial construction to efficient, renewable electricity:**

We advocated for all of these policies up until the last stretch of the campaign when City Council prioritized the pollution fee ordinance.



Campaign Timeline



Rally outside City Council Chambers before the final vote



Photograph by Ashland News

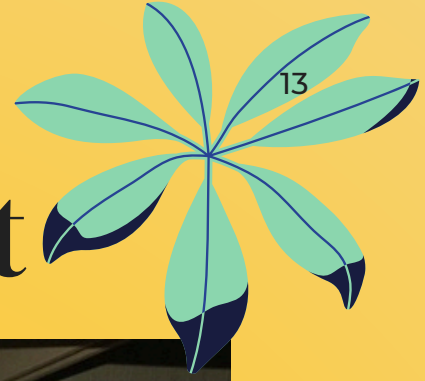
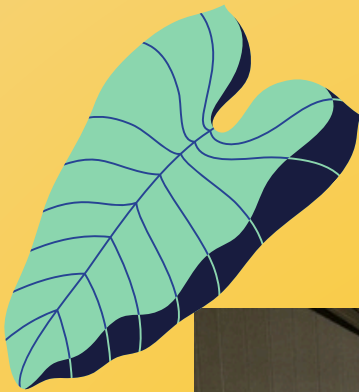
Campaign Journey + Tactics



Lobbying:

Since a large part of our campaign revolved around the decisions made by the local government, one of the most powerful strategies we used was lobbying. Throughout the course of the campaign, we made it a priority to frequently meet with each councilor, regardless of their stance on the policy, to build strong relationships and work to alleviate any concerns that arose involving legality or feasibility. By planning these meetings, not only were we able to answer questions, we were able to hold councilors accountable to promises they made throughout the process.

These meetings were largely facilitated by our youth members, often with a Rogue Climate staff member present to clarify policy points. During meetings, youth held various roles such as facilitator, note taker, story teller, policy lead, and someone to present the direct ask. Meetings with the councilor were scheduled through their emails or by phone. Our team would meet 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time to prep, assign roles, and practice storytelling and the direct ask. Carra Sahler, Director of the Green Energy Institute, would often join to clarify legal considerations of the policy. We debriefed after each meeting to reflect on what we had learned and achieved in the meeting and how we would use it to strengthen our strategy next time.



Internal Support



Active Recruitment

Rogue Climate runs a bi-yearly internship with another non-profit organization, the Rogue Action Center. The internship focuses on social and climate justice issues and provides training on organizing skills. As part of the internship, interns spend a few hours a week working with a project group, such as RCAT. This allows RCAT to constantly recruit new members from this internship. We also do recruitment through canvassing, tabling, events, presentations at schools, and through friends. This allows us to maintain a decent sized group to work on the campaign together.

Rallies & Art Events

One way that RCAT maintained a consistent presence in the community was by organizing creative and educational events to recruit new members and engage current volunteers, planning rallies and mini walkouts when attending City Council meetings, and holding educational events about the harms of gas appliances in homes. These events allowed community members to get involved and educated on gas as well as train new volunteers on how to have conversations about these topics when canvassing.



Power Mapping

One way that we identified key players in the campaign was through powermapping, which is an organizing tool that places different stakeholders on a quadrant graph based on their support/opposition and level of influence. This way, we were able to see where our canvassing and lobbying efforts were most needed. Some examples of certain stakeholders on our power map were the West Coast gas company Avista and local construction workers. Avista was in the upper left corner due to their strong opposition to our campaign and influence on the council.

Construction companies, on the other hand, had less political power but were important voices in the conversation and often supportive of our campaign. Power mapping was a very useful tool for us in assessing where our priorities were as power dynamics shifted.



Petition and Collective Image

Throughout the campaign, we continuously collected petition signatures in support of the policy package by canvassing, hosting events, and community outreach. The petition was not only helpful in illustrating community support but also allowed us to expand our base of volunteers and youth joining the campaign. Over the course of the campaign, we received over 1,100 signatures.

When attending community events, including City Council meetings, we made an effort to designate ourselves as a collective. To do this, we would all wear the color blue or any clothing that represents Rogue Climate/RCAT. We would often hold art making events for people to bring tee shirts to screen print our logo onto and decorate. By doing so, we were easily recognizable as a group which allowed us to showcase support for our campaign.

Testimony

Another tactic central to our engagement with City Council was the utilization of public forum during council and CEPAC meetings. Powerful testimonies delivered back to back by those supportive of our campaign worked to showcase why people were supportive of our campaign.

RCAT hosted testimony workshops to help youth and community members prepare and practice their testimonies before going to City Council and CEPAC. We also identified and secured support from people with key perspectives that needed to be in the conversation on electrification, such as youth and elders who are most susceptible to the health impacts of air pollution, as well as construction workers and contractors who work outside and whose jobs would be directly affected by a building ordinance. Overall, 75 spoken testimonies were given in support of the campaign.

Keeping a consistent presence in the community

Throughout the campaign, we continuously met with councilors, attended City Council/committee meetings, and held rallies and events. When the City Council stalled the process, we showed up to every meeting as a group to demand that the ordinance be put on the council's agenda. By doing so, we were able to maintain a sense of urgency and relevance to City Councilors. We made it clear that we weren't going to be ignored and that we weren't going to stop until the policy was passed. Our consistent presence was also a practice in our community outreach. We made an effort to continuously connect with residents of Ashland to hear their concerns, educate them about the policy, and inform them how it would or wouldn't impact them.

Canvassing and tabling at events and out in the community allowed us to connect with and hear from community members directly. When canvassing for events and petition signatures, we were able to spread information about our campaign and encourage people to take direct action with us. We would make frequent appearances at events such as local Farmers Markets and city-sponsored activities.

Canvassing is also a great way to engage volunteers, new and established. When growing your volunteer base, it is important to make space for volunteers to take on roles. Established canvassers within the team would also practice and train new team members on canvassing to develop our skills as a group.





Communication & Outreach

We had many conversations with local companies, including construction and HVAC, to assess their stance on the policy. We found that some developers, such as KDA Homes and the Housing Authority of Jackson County who build affordable housing in the area, already build all-electric because it is cheaper and safer compared to building with gas. When the people we spoke to expressed support, we sent them a sign-on-letter so they could show their company's support.

We used various platforms and tools to help keep our data and connect with our base including Powerbase and GetThru. Since RCAT is a youth organization within Rogue Climate, we were able to use the organization's data and outreach tools which we used to track petition signatures and other information signatories into profiles and groups which allowed us to follow up with contacts for phone and textbanking. Like canvassing, phonebanking is a great way to engage volunteers and connect with our base when we are holding events or coming up on a vital City Council meeting. Pulling contacts from our petition list and calling to personally invite them made it more likely for people to attend and voice any access needs. For text banking, we use GetThru, which allows us to send hundreds of texts in just a few minutes, while still being able to manage and reply to them ourselves. This allows us to gauge who will attend an event/action and provide any information to help boost turnout. Textbanks were also a great way to grow organizing skills for youth members who were new to the work.

Framing

Mitigating the effects of climate change can oftentimes be a polarizing or overwhelming topic for a campaign, especially in a smaller community like the Rogue Valley. To mitigate this, we often avoided explicitly using terms like "climate change", "global warming" or "green" when talking about our campaign as to be more approachable. Instead, we embraced the health, affordability, and efficiency that come with electrification. Those who don't know a lot about climate change may shy away from supporting a climate change policy, but if we speak about how our policy aims to mitigate indoor air pollution, make home appliances more efficient, and make appliances and energy more affordable, then more people tend to listen.



Obstacles and Opposition



There are challenges with any campaign, and as youth, we often face patronization and being talked down to because of our age. Our campaign was youth-oriented and focused on the inherent credibility of our perspective having grown up seeing the effects of climate change firsthand. We often encountered opposition from Ashland City staff and others who saw us as naive or incapable teenagers. We also struggled with the slow pace and red tape from the local government. RCAT would go months with progress stalled and no one telling us what was going on in council, leading to frustration and disillusionment. To combat this, we would organize events within RCAT and the public to keep up momentum.

We also had our fair share of opposition throughout the campaign. Like mentioned previously, we approached these attacks and misinformed claims by maintaining confidence and reaffirming the facts of our campaign.

Our Victory

In November of 2024, the Ashland City Council announced that the first reading of the carbon pollution fee would be on the agenda and the proposed ordinance was released to the public. Immediately, we were scrambling to contact city officials when we saw that the wording around revenue stated that the money “may” be directed to a climate justice fund. The wording of the policy is extremely important to ensure that the effects will be equitable and benefit communities most affected by climate change, such as low-income households and communities of color. RCAT maintained our demand to not only pass the pollution fee but also ensure that the money will be put to fighting the climate crisis in the Rogue Valley.

As we were nearing the end, opposition started to ramp up. Avista representatives began to show up to City Council meetings to try and discredit our 2 years of work. At the start of 2025, Northwest Coalition for Energy Choice, a non profit registered to the executive director of the Northwest Gas Association, published an article about the pollution fee claiming it would make housing more expensive and harm underprivileged communities. They ended the article with a call to action for people to contact Ashland City Council to urge them to vote no on the fee. This was paired with automatic calls directed at Ashland residents urging them to oppose our pollution fee. As a group, we chose to not address this misinformation formally in the media and instead chose to strengthen our connection and trust with the community. Councilors remarked that these repetitive, pre-written responses that people were being directed to send did more harm than good for their case. They could see that the opposition had no personal passion or stake in the ordinance’s failure. Contrastingly, the trust we had built with the community overpowered the opposition and we were able to reach City Council through human connection rather than corporate greed.



The Vote

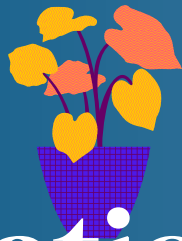
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Our campaign's final council meeting in February 2025 held an entirely unique energy. We rallied to fill City Council chambers with volunteers, friends, community members, and allies. Anticipation buzzed as our people told powerful stories and led motivating chants and songs. Inside, the City Council chambers were overflowing and more of our supporters waited in the lobby watching the decision unfold via livestream, excitedly awaiting our policy's place on the agenda. After hours of waiting, we were informed our time had been cut to 1 minute each due to the amount of people who signed up for testimony. We had over 30 live testimonies in support of our campaign from longstanding volunteers and supportive community members. The last testimony of the night came from a woman who had never heard of our campaign before but had received an automated call from our opposition. In her testimony she said that the call made her look into our campaign and show up in support of us. Her support and the combined efforts of our hardworking team and community members showed the City Council that even after two years and countless setbacks, there is still a demand to electrify Ashland.

After the forum concluded, the council started to call a vote. The first council member to give their opinion was Councilman Dahle, someone who at the start of this campaign we wouldn't have thought would vote yes. As he made his statement, each of the council members followed suit ending with a unanimous vote in favour of our pollution fee which will go into effect January 2026.

The Celebration



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After winning a campaign, it is important to allow yourself and the group to rest and celebrate your win. This prevents burnout and gives you a better headspace to go into a new campaign or whatever your future holds. We took a month or two to regroup and plan an awesome victory party to celebrate our win with everyone who made it possible. RCAT members, volunteers, staff, partner organizations and local elected officials gathered for tamales, screen printing and drag performances to celebrate!



Recommendations



- Want to pass a similar policy? Each campaign is dependent on its community and its culture, we hope this concise list could be a resource in your campaign journey.
- Become a member in your city councils energy committee
- Find an organization organizing around clean energy. Are they pushing any electrification policies? Send them an email or contact their socials to join their team?
- Host an event to find those in your community wanting to organize around similar policies.
- Reach out to your friends!

Tips & Key Tactics:

- Community engagement: host community education events and keep volunteers updated on progress
- Work with your City Council, find common ground, be persistent
- Find common ground within your community. Why would your policies benefit them?
- Don't be intimidated by the fossil fuel industry, they will try to delegitimize your campaign. Stand strong, call them out, and reveal their tactics.
- Stay persistent but don't burn out. Movement work is tiring, we cannot continue progressing if we lose our committed ones to burn out. Take care of yourself and your team, take breaks, step up, and support each other.

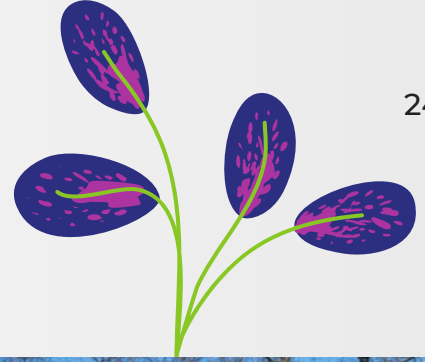
Call to Action

Right now, the people's right to a livable future is being threatened and demands immediate action. As the generation that has grown up experiencing the consequences of the climate crisis, today's youth are vital to the movement to hold governments and corporations accountable in the fight for environmental justice. That's why we at Rogue Climate are asking you to take action by getting involved with an environmentalist group, protesting unjust climate policy, and advocating for a livable future.

**Get involved at
RogueClimate.org**



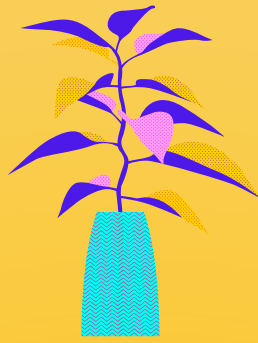
Conclusion



The Ashland Youth for Electrification Campaign is a policy push for clean energy and support for those most impacted by climate change, but it's also so much more than policy; it's putting the power in the hands of the people. Throughout the campaign we built connections and relationships with individuals and organizations, organizing together to protest the expansion of fossil fuels.

This campaign was an opportunity to make change in a time where so many of us are feeling helpless about the state of politics and the climate. We keep going because we know when the people come together, good will always prevail. We hope that our communities can continue organizing to defeat the era of fossil fuels and transform current systems. While this campaign has lots of support, it started with a small group of people building off each other's ideas and personal power. We hope this resource can spark an idea or help you in your future organizing.

Resources



One of the most important resources in this campaign was our connection with an environment and energy lawyer, Carra Sahler, who is the Director of the Green Energy Institute (GEI) at Lewis & Clark Law School. GEI had been working on helping Talent, a city north of Ashland, pass an emissions ordinance. Rogue Climate reached out to Sahler for guidance on our campaign and she became our legal point of contact for lobby meetings and also drafted the ordinance we proposed to the City Council. She would join lobby meetings to explain legal pathways and contacted the CEPAC liaison Chad Woodward about legal issues and how the committee was making progress. Having a legal expert in the campaign proved to be extremely helpful as the RCAT team navigated the world of local government.



Special Thanks To

Thank You's
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