

The Register-Guard

Opinion

Lane County Leaning Green

By Bob Doppelt

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Last month the Lane County Commissioners took the first step toward mitigating the County's environmental effects by receiving a report from the Public Works Department about its impact reduction efforts. Kudos to the commissioners for proposing the initiative. With innovative holistic thinking and approaches it could set the county on an exciting new path.

After listening to the Public Works presentation and reading its report, it appears it has taken some modest yet positive steps to reduce its carbon footprint. For example, it's expanding the use of electric vehicles, doing "small things" to make its buildings more energy efficient, and working with local organizations to raise the county's waste recovery rate to 63%.

Interviews with other county departments prior to the session — including Homes for Good — found that most are also trying to reduce their effects. In addition, I spoke with each of the commissions (except Jay Bozievich, who didn't respond to multiple interview requests). All were committed to the initiative and offered ideas. And I previously interacted with county personnel on issues that shed some light on their readiness for the effort.

These contacts led to a number of observations.

The county will benefit if all personnel are educated about the perilous conditions of our environment. Not all staff seem to grasp how burning fossil fuels, cutting trees, spraying poisons, and other practices contribute to climate disruption, exterminate biodiversity, undermine human health and threaten civilization as we know it. Everyone should learn basic ecological principles, understand how different products and practices harm the environment and develop skills to heal nature.

As this occurs, new perspectives might emerge if residents were engaged in a process to create an ideal vision of how the county would look and function in future years if local greenhouse gasses were eliminated and it became a place where both people and nature are healed and thrive. This would be a vision of hope, and it could set the direction for a county restoration, health, and wellness action plan. This would be a vision of hope, and it could set the direction for a health and wellness action plan for the county.

One emphasis of the plan should be slashing fossil fuel-based emissions, including those from road and building construction and maintenance, purchasing, and more, to near zero by 2030. A matching focus should be on restoring trees, soils, and vegetation to capture and hold more carbon and support biodiversity.

In addition, the plan should identify ways to prepare infrastructure to withstand the extreme rain, snow, windstorms, wildfires, floods and other disasters.

Equally important, the plan should go beyond internal county operations to organize collaborative networks that help local communities solve problems without environmental damage. The plan should help residents build psychological and psychosocial resilience for the acute traumas, chronic stresses, and physical health effects of climate change and other disasters. Engaging residents in activities that build personal and social health while also healing the environment might prove to be a powerful way to accomplish these ends.

The proposed county plan could do much more than eradicate bad things. It can also engage staff and residents in an enlivening initiative that greatly enhances human and ecological health and wellbeing.

Bob Doppelt directs The Resource Innovation Group and writes a monthly column for the Register-Guard on climate change-related issues.