

# Council OKs sharp emissions reductions

## Must decrease by 25 percent by 2020 in spite of population growth

By [Robert Speer](#)

To say veteran Chico City Councilman Steve Bertagna has come full circle on the issue of global warming isn't quite accurate, but it's close. As he put it during Tuesday's council meeting (Sept. 2), explaining his decision to support strong greenhouse-gas-reduction goals in the greater Chico area, "I haven't drunk the Kool-Aid, but I think it's the right thing to do."

Back in October 2006, Bertagna was one of three councilmembers who withstood the boos of an overflow crowd in council chambers and voted against signing onto the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. They said the matter had been thrust upon them at the last moment and that they didn't know enough to vote on it.

Council supporters of the agreement, led by outgoing Mayor Scott Gruendl, said it was only a policy statement, there was nothing binding about the agreement, and it didn't commit the city to any course of action or expenditure. It passed, 4-3.

Since then, it *has* cost money—specifically, \$30,000 to have a group of Chico State students do a baseline survey of the greenhouse gases (GHG) emitted in the area. When the money was allocated, in November 2007, Bertagna—still protesting that the mayors' agreement had been "pushed down our throats"—reluctantly voted to support it. "I've been skeptical [about the climate-change agreement] the whole time, but there's probably a great deal of value in having a baseline," he said.

And on Tuesday, councilmembers did make a climate-change commitment, and a challenging one at that. With Councilman Larry Wahl (a sure no vote) absent to attend the Republican National Convention, the council voted unanimously to approve the recommendation of its Sustainability Task Force—established as a result of the mayors' agreement—to set a goal of reducing GHG emissions from their 2005 levels by 25 percent by 2020 and to develop a climate action plan (CAP) to do so. The CAP will be added to the city's new general plan.

If 25 percent doesn't seem like much, consider this: If the city did nothing between now and 2020, GHG emissions would increase by 40 percent because of population growth, explained Mark Stemen, the Chico State professor who supervised the survey team. So the actual reduction will have to be 65 percent of projected 2020 levels.

The good news is that the effort is well under way, Stemen said. Since 2005, a number of improvements have already brought down the GHG emissions. He warned, though, that after this "low-hanging fruit" is picked, further reductions



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Councilman Steve Bertagna said he hasn't "drunk the Kool-Aid," but he's definitely come around on putting Chico out front in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, despite "getting some phone calls" from his business-community constituents.

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will become more difficult.

It will take a community-wide effort. “There’s no silver bullet that will solve the problem,” he said. “It’s more like silver buckshot.”

The baseline survey revealed that, as of 2005, vehicles were the source of most GHG (54 percent), with commercial (including the city of Chico and Chico State) contributing 23 percent, residential 19 percent and waste 4 percent. Industry, a major contributor in other cities, was responsible for less than 1 percent of the GHG.

**Stemen praised the council** for having the foresight to commission the survey, offering special thanks to Bertagna for his courage in the face of criticism from his business constituency.

But he also pointed out that the state’s aggressive push on climate change had made the survey, goals and climate-action plan not just useful, but virtually mandatory. He noted that Attorney General Jerry Brown was suing agencies that didn’t deal with GHG emissions in their general plans, and said the state’s goals will become increasingly strict. It’s a good thing, he said, that “Chico is out in front” on this.

Since transportation is such a large contributor to Chico’s GHG, Vice Mayor Ann Schwab said, “it should be analyzed in terms of land use.” The council will be deciding on the general plan’s land-use policies at an upcoming meeting.

When the council approved funding for the survey last year, the argument was made that having it would put the city in good position to obtain grant funding to develop and implement a CAP. By Tuesday, however, that seemed less likely.

“We’re looking for grants, but we haven’t seen much,” said Linda Herman, a management analyst with the city’s General Services Department and the staff liaison to the Sustainability Task Force.

Schwab, who chairs the task force, said the group needs to do more research on options for the CAP before it will know the cost.

But Mayor Andy Holcombe pointed out that, if they’re going to get the CAP into the general plan, “at some time we’ll need to spend the money” to do so.

“Let’s do it right and let’s do it well,” said Councilwoman Mary Flynn. “We don’t want to be in the position three years from now where the state’s coming in and telling us we need to update our general plan.”

For his part, Gruendl was almost ecstatic. “Since I signed the mayors’ climate agreement 20 months ago,” he said, “I can’t believe the amount of work that has occurred since then.” He said he was proud of his community for taking a leadership role to protect the planet.

Bertagna was pleased, too. Whatever one thinks about global warming, he said, “We shouldn’t be spewing garbage into the air.” Besides, he added, “it’s an economic-development issue” and potentially good for business.