

City begins work to curb Evanston carbon emissions

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Evanston began working toward developing an official plan for becoming environmentally-friendly, as about 100 residents, students and others met at the Civic Center on Tuesday night to discuss how to reduce carbon emissions locally.

At the Evanston Climate Action Plan committees' first meeting, presenters described the Chicago Climate Action Plan and Evanston's current greenhouse gas emissions and reduction targets. Attendees then broke into nine specific task forces, such as energy efficiency in buildings, transportation and land-use, and waste reduction and recycling.

The focus of the meeting was to evaluate Evanston's current greenhouse emissions and how to reduce the city's carbon footprint. Last fall the City Council joined 699 other cities and signed onto a Climate Protection Agreement that follows the Kyoto Protocol. Under goals set by that act, by 2012 Evanston should lower emissions to 7 percent below what they were in 1990.

In 2005, it is estimated that the city of Evanston, including the municipality, residents and Northwestern, released 1.27 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions. Seventy-one percent of these emissions were from electricity, 21 percent came from transportation and the remainder came from a combination of solid waste and water recycling. In order to reach its goal, Evanston must reduce its current emissions by 14 percent.

"Once we hit this, it isn't over," said Linda Young, research manager for the Center for Neighborhood Technology, which researched Chicago's climate mitigation strategies. "Many cities are aiming to (maintain this reduction) and go over."

Young said cities and urban areas are an essential answer to the climate crisis, not the problem.

"This is an economic opportunity for small businesses to develop new technologies, and also for households," Young said.

Other solutions discussed included promoting mass transportation, using solar panels, and buying locally grown organic foods. Young said these simple tasks can make a substantial difference, but only if individuals make an effort to commit to them.

"A lot can be done with just a change in behavior," Young said.

Attendees signed up for specific roles within each task force. Those who signed up are expected to begin working at an individual level by May 2008.

"This is something that is mushrooming and potentially becoming a very large effort, so it's important for people to have something substantial to do," said Hal Sprague, community co-chairman of the policy and research task force.

Event organizers said they were surprised by the number of people who attended the meeting.

"This speaks volumes to the level of support (we are receiving)," said Carolyn Collopy, Evanston's sustainability coordinator. "I can't do this without you, and I don't want to do this without you."

Much of the discussion was open-ended and task forces will arrange further meeting dates. Participants said they are optimistic about the plan.

"I came to get a sense of how action plans like this would progress and be implemented," said McCormick junior Alex Stack, who was one of about a dozen NU students who attended. "As people realize responsibilities and rules, things will fall into place."

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