COMMUNITY CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE

C3's Policy Recommendations for Decarbonizing Charlottesville Gas

Charlottesville, VA | October 2023

In recent years, Charlottesville's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings have decreased steadily, consistent with community-wide GHG reduction. However, natural gas GHG emissions are rising. As of 2019, GHG emissions from natural gas use accounted for 19% of the community's GHG emissions, up from 16% in 2016. Charlottesville's ownership of its natural-gas utility provides the city with unique tools and pathways for meeting its climate goals. Check out C3's recommendations, co-created with Livable Cville, for rapidly and equitably decarbonizing Charlottesville Gas.

Strategies for Mitigating Natural Gas Emissions - Recommendations for Charlottesville Climate Action Plan

Letter to Charlottesville Climate Team

In recent years, Charlottesville's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings have decreased steadily, consistent with City-wide GHG reduction. However, natural gas GHG emissions are rising. As of 2019, natural gas GHG emissions accounted for 19% of the city's GHG emissions, up from 16% in 2016. Charlottesville's ownership of its natural-gas utility provides the city with unique tools and pathways toward meeting its climate goals.

Decarbonizing gas infrastructure engenders four primary equity concerns: (1) the infrastructure costs divided between a shrinking customer base, (2) the prohibitive cost of electric upgrades, (3) the split incentive problem for tenants, and (4) the just workforce transition. We at C3, together with Livable C'Ville, urge the City of Charlottesville to consider the recommendations below to center equity in the transition away from natural gas:

Note: This document provides preliminary recommendations for mitigating GHG emissions resulting from natural gas usage in the City of Charlottesville. These recommendations are not final and are expected to evolve as the Charlottesville "Professional Services - Decarbonization Of Gas Utility" study advances and as C3 (and partners) continue working with local residents and community leaders. We appreciate your consideration of these current recommendations and hope to continue working together to refine them.

Recommendations

- **Until Charlottesville Gas decarbonization is fully concluded, place a moratorium on:**
  - All new hookups/installations at new service locations; [1,2]
  - All non-residential new hookups/installations of natural gas services; [3,4]
  - All non-essential infrastructure projects;
  - Remove cost-free installation of new residential gas lines.

- **Develop a just and equitable transition plan to a carbon-neutral community by:**
  - Creating/appointing a community committee, consisting of ratepayers, low-income residents, and renters.
  - Identifying and prioritizing effective implementation methods for residential electrification. Such as:

[1] Ong, A. et. al. 2021. The costs of building decarbonization policy proposals for California natural gas ratepayers: identifying cost-effective paths to a zero carbon building fleet. Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment. Available at: https://woodsinstitute.stanford.edu/system/files/publications/Building_Decarbonization_Policy_CA_Natural_Gas_Ratepayers_Whitepaper.pdf

[2] Balaraman, K. 2022. California moves to eliminate gas line extension subsidies starting in 2023 amid building decarbonization push. Utility Dive. Available at: https://www.utilitydive.com/news/california-puc-subsidies-gas-lines/629278/

[3] See Ong et al.

[4] See Balaraman.

    - Branch prune by turning off natural gas distribution pipelines in a geographically systematic way; [5]
    - Create a program to equitably incentivize efficient electrification. [6]
  - Developing resiliency infrastructure to address grid resiliency concerns as peak electricity loads increase;
  - Developing educational materials and outreach strategies to better inform community members of energy education and services available to them. [7]

- **Promote a just transition to the gas infrastructure workforce by providing job training and placement with an emphasis on the green industry.**

- **Redirect Charlottesville Gas' carbon offsets toward reducing local GHG emissions by:**
  - Focusing on improving local energy equity and alleviating energy costs of highly; energy-burdened households;
  - Ending rebates for utility consumer purchase of tankless water heaters;
  - Extending other energy-efficient rebates to all city residents.

- **Prevent investments in new natural-gas-powered capital in city-owned assets.**

- **Detect, document, and publish detailed reports of all natural gas leaks in the Charlottesville Gas distribution system:**
  - Include leaks' locations, durations, estimates of total leaked volume, estimates of resulting GHG emissions, and other relevant environmental impacts; [8, 9]
  - Include the age and condition of pipelines where possible.

- **Prepare a legal defense for decommissioning a public service:**
  - Devise alternative revenue sources for the city to recuperate lost gas sales.

Thank you!

We appreciate the opportunity to address these important issues. We believe that our city has the creativity, leadership, and community resources that will allow us to align all of our planning efforts around mutual goals of creating a more just and sustainable future.

Sincerely,
Charlottesville area non-profits for climate justice

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[5] East Bay Community Energy. 2022. EBCE Studies Gas System Pruning. Available at: https://ebce.org/news-and-events/ceos-desk/ebce-studies-gas-system-pruning/

[6] State of California Energy Commission. 2020. Strategic Pathways and Analytics for Tactical Decommissioning of Portions of Natural Gas Infrastructure. Available at: https://www.energy.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/00_GFO-20-503-Strategic%20Pathways%20and%20Analytics%20for%20Tactical%20Decommissioning%20of%20Natural%20Gas%20Infrastructure%20Manual%20Addendum%201_ADA.docx

[7] U.S. Department of Energy. 2013. Three Virginia Programs to Overcome Barriers to Upgrades. Available at: https://www.energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/three-virginia-programs-overcome-barriers-upgrades

[8] Von Fischer, JC, Cooley, D, Chamberlain, S, Gaylord, A, Griebenow, CJ, Hamburg, SP, Salo, J, Schumacher, R, Theobald, D, Ham, J. 2017. Rapid, vehicle-based identification and magnitude of urban natural gas pipeline leaks. Environmental Science & Technology. 51 (7) 4091—4099. Available at: https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/acs.est.6b06095

[9] Harwood, M, Newlin, S, Velez, K, Vigen Ralston, M. 2021. The Flipside Report: A white paper on targeted geographic electrification in California's gas transition. Building Decarbonization Coalition and CommonSpark Consulting. Available at: https://www.buildingdecarb.org/uploads/3/0/7/3/30734489/the_flipside_report_-_targeted_electrification_for_gas_transition.pdf

Partnering Organizations

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