

# A Draft for Climate Action in Ojai

*“In nature nothing exists alone.” – Rachel Carson*

It's natural to want solutions to problems, no matter how complicated the problems are, to be defined in 5 to 19 words (a suggested ideal length for social media posts). **A city's conscientious response to climate change that is substantial, achievable, and aligned with other local priorities will require a coordinated vision and a persistent effort.** A *“Yes on this... No on that...”* headline approach will not do here, and these challenges are too important for us to be superficial.

Following is a group of 8 subject areas, offered as an outline for a holistic strategy. These subject areas will all require research, conversation, and perhaps demonstration projects. The list may expand and contract as needs and outcomes present themselves. This document is a draft, intending to inspire a thorough action plan by our city leadership and non-profits to bring environmental strengthening to all of the matters facing our community.

*“To accelerate climate action, the adverse consequences of these changes can be moderated by fiscal, financial, institutional and regulatory reforms and by integrating climate actions with macroeconomic policies through (i) economy-wide packages, consistent with national circumstances, supporting sustainable low-emission growth paths; (ii) climate resilient safety nets and social protection; and (iii) improved access to finance for low-emissions infrastructure and technologies.”*

– Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - 2023 - Summary for Policy Makers

## 1) Wildland Fire Preparation

*“Wildfires make up 5 to 10 percent of annual global CO2 emissions each year.” – Inside Climate News*

While there are limits to what we can do to prevent a wildland fire within the adjacent forests, there is much we can do within our city and valley, including offering city-based financial incentives to harden homes and businesses, use of fire-resistant building materials (see Green and Flexible Building Ordinances below), and maintain defensible spaces. Ojai, in partnership with existing local organizations, could roll out an exhaustive plan and seek additional funding to accelerate invasive vegetation mitigation and revise tree-limb removal ordinances to include fire-safety exemptions. Before fire returns to our area, our first priority should be to enhance the defence of our civilized areas. If we fail in emergency readiness, all of the following points are moot.

## 2) Water Management

There are 25 instream flow projects that have been articulated by the Ventura County Resource Conservation District, 4 of which are in the City of Ojai. One of these City projects details financial incentives for rainwater and greywater capture for homes and businesses, and 3 are basin recharge projects (such as along Signal and Grand). Ojai could initiate the recharge projects and follow other cities in offering rain barrels to all home addresses (for example), along with workshops on installation and use. In addition to these solutions, the current street paving plan could pause and reevaluate material alternatives to help with water and more...

## 3) Street Paving

Ojai could explore the price, durability, and timeline effect of alternatives to normal asphalt, such as porous recycled, concrete, perpetual pavement, and other options. Cities are implementing these alternatives now. Benefits can include **substantially** reduced large-scale carbon emissions, ground water basin recharge before flowing to the river, and cooled neighborhood temperatures. Ojai is currently engaged in road paving. Why not research these alternatives immediately and then re-prioritize if feasible?

*“Act in such a way that you would will your act to be a law for all people.”* – Immanuel Kant

#### **4) City-Sponsored Incentives for Homes and Businesses**

We value replacing natural gas with electrification, along with the installation of solar energy generation. City-sponsored financial incentives could help home and business owners more easily move to these technologies, reducing our carbon emissions and strengthening our energy infrastructure (see Micro-Grid below). Further, tree planting and canopy development can be enhanced and financially supported.

#### **5) Green and Thoughtful Building Ordinances**

Environment-friendly building materials (e.g. cob, recycled steel, bamboo) and building plans could, with the proper research and demonstration, move to city-approved status, encouraging a robust and ready set of options for any construction. Further, the City could look upon each construction proposal as an opportunity for partnership, instead of the adversarial mode sometimes expressed currently. Each project should be evaluated in detail, so that the spirit of our strategy, instead of the inflexible adherence to ordinances, can be met. This process takes longer, but there are very few project at any time, allowing this diligence.

#### **6) Building Affordable Housing**

By many accounts we have a housing problem in Ojai, with middle- and low-income families being priced out of the Valley. We have Ojai Unified School District enrollment declining for more than 20 years and a resident median age that went up nearly 10 years in the last two censuses. Our older residents are struggling to find housing that will work with their fixed incomes. Additionally, on average there are over 30,000 car trips every day, with 47% being in and out of the Valley, representing 83 percent of the miles traveled (City-data.com). The average work commute for Valley residents is over 26 minutes (www.datause.io).

*“Our personal vehicles are a major cause of global warming. Collectively, cars and trucks account for nearly one-fifth of all US emissions, emitting around 24 pounds of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gases for every gallon of gas. About five pounds comes from the extraction, production, and delivery of the fuel, while the great bulk of heat-trapping emissions—more than 19 pounds per gallon—comes right out of a car’s tailpipe.”* – www.ucusa.org/resources/car-emissions-global-warming

In addition to the stark need for another Whispering Oaks to be built here (top priority), there are already early discussions of workforce housing proposals for Ojai on several fronts. If just a small portion of people who commute into Ojai for work could now live here, we save on traffic, carbon emissions, re-establish our middle-income families and have the potential to revitalize OUSD enrollment (our future).

*“To be effective, environmental solutions must be personal, perceptible, and practical.”* – Susan Solomon

#### **7) Economic Development Coordination**

We also have an economic challenge in Ojai - the over-reliance on tourism revenue. This is not a new problem, but it is a problem that has grown over time. Many large employers have left Ojai, with a general feeling of difficulty in working with Ojai’s government. Again, in the spirit of partnership, Ojai can establish an Economic Development Position or Commission to actively work with local organizations to help businesses we want to come and thrive in Ojai (businesses such as professional firms, consulting companies, non-manufacturing tech, science research, etc.). Further, Ojai can review its zoning to find collaborative solutions and creatively remove barriers

to having higher-paying jobs here. Traffic and carbon emission can be reduced if more people who already live here can also work here. Areas 6 and 7 both have the potential to dramatically strengthen our environment while also addressing other challenges our city is struggling with.

## 8) Creating an Electric Micro-Grid

There are currently 119 micro-grid sites in California - most using solar, wind, and storage ([www.caloes.ca.gov](http://www.caloes.ca.gov)). This is a long-term solution but one that can be researched now. A micro-grid in the Valley, supplied by individual and local governmental solar energy creation, offers flexibility, assurance of cleaner energy, and protection if the larger grid is threatened. Many micro-grids have resulted in lower rates for customers. Again, let's begin the feasibility and funding research now and, perhaps one day, have an energy-autonomous Valley! With this work in place, we may also begin to move more utility infrastructure underground. This is highly desirable for many reasons (including fire safety), but costly and slow. Still, for our environment, safety, and sustainability, why not launch these research projects as soon as we can?

*"Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life."* – Hans Jonas

## A Pause and a Reconsideration

Some of these areas could be implemented quickly (financial incentives to align with our community values), other areas are medium term (housing and economic development), and some are long term (a micro-grid). All three types of solutions can be explored in tandem, finding ways to complement each other as they develop, and involving the community at every key point.

We can look at our current budget to fund these strategies. The city has an ordinance of maintaining a 50% reserve of its operating budget, which is currently \$16.3 million.

*"The total projected General Fund reserve (combining both the emergency reserve required by 2001 City Council policy, as well as additional unprogrammed and unrestricted funds) to be \$20.1 million by the end of FY 2024-25. This results in reserves exceeding 100% General Fund expenditures by approximately \$3.4 million. City staff will be returning to the City Council in the near future, following adoption of the FY 2024-25 budget, to discuss proposed potential allocation options for this \$3.4 million delta over the 100% General Fund expenditure reserve level."* – Proposed Municipal Budget Fiscal year 2024-2025

## We can decide what to do with the surplus!

*"For formal reserves, the majority of the reserves are below 20% of the city's expenditures. On the other hand, the magnitude of informal reserve funds is much greater, sometimes even adding up to over 100% of a city's expenditures. Most of the informal reserve fund balances are still equal to less than 50% of the cities' expenditures. – Occidental College Urban and Environmental Policy Senior Comprehensive Research Project April 6, 2022*

If we determine to stay with the 50% formal reserve, we yield a surplus of nearly \$12 million. If we find a middle ground of a 75% formal reserve, we yield nearly \$8 million. You get the idea. Let's use the position we are in to express our values as reasonably and as consistently as we can, **solving multiple challenges at once.**

This is just the beginning! Your feedback is welcome and wanted.

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