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An Oregon City Banned Natural Gas. The Gas Company Fought Back.

Eugene’s ordinance restricting gas hookups in new construction was set to be the state’s first – until a local utility and its allies launched a \$1 million counterattack.

In February, when the city council in Eugene, Oregon, passed an ordinance banning natural gas hookups in new low-rise construction, local environmental groups cheered. This was a chance for the college town to take a step toward reducing carbon emissions, help support the state’s climate action plan and make history as the first city in Oregon to pass such a law.

Mayor Lucy Vinis pushed for legislators to support the ordinance, which prevailed in a 5-3 vote. “There will be some joy in the community tonight,” she said.

Now Eugene’s ban is making news for another reason, after allies of Portland-based utility company NW Natural launched a rapid-response campaign to force a public vote undoing the legislation. The firm spent roughly \$1 million to bankroll Eugene for Energy Choice, a group opposing the ban that started collecting signatures for a referendum just weeks after the council’s action. Eugene voters are likely to decide on the ordinance’s fate via a ballot measure in November.

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