

Estes Park Sustainability Initiatives

Together We Build, February 9, 2022

by Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Two weeks ago we looked at regional efforts to find ways to incentivize our communities toward sustainable practices, including the Larimer County Climate Smart Initiative. This week we will look at the specific recommendations of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force (ESTF) for Estes Park. Full disclosure, Thomas Beck is one of the members appointed to the ESTF, which crafted the report submitted to the Town Board for consideration at their meeting on February 8, 2022. The link to the recorded meeting is <https://youtu.be/UeDw3Oq7DsA>. The link to the report can be found on the Town of Estes Park website (<https://estespark.colorado.gov/estf>). Appendix 1 of the report includes all of the Public Engagement, including the comments received up to December 13, 2021. The Town Board received the report and then will discuss it at a Study Session scheduled for February 22, 2022. The trustees will then consider what next steps to take based on the Task Force recommendations. We encourage you to read the recommendations, participate by submitting comments and strongly insist the Town Board act on the ESTF recommendations. The link for providing public comment for a current Town Board Agenda can be found at <https://estespark.colorado.gov/mayorandtrustees>.

The ESTF divided into 3 working subgroups in order to effectively handle the huge topic of sustainability. The subgroups examined 1) Sustainable Energy; 2) Solid Waste Management and 3) Institutional Factors for Sustainability. The meetings of ESTF were public, and surveys were conducted, the results of which are included in the final report.

Sustainable Energy subgroup makes 20 recommendations encompassing residential, commercial, institutional solar, wind, hydro, construction and building practices, electrification of vehicles and equipment such as power tools. Infrastructure for charging electric vehicles is addressed. The Energy subgroup also makes recommendations for multi-modal transportation, and mention specifically the Complete Streets principles used in the 4th Street project. According to the US Department of Transportation "Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users." (<https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/complete-streets>)

The recommendations include incentives for residents and businesses to install solar. According to the report the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) estimates that roughly 75% of residential structures in Estes Park may be suitable for solar energy generation. "As of November 10, 2021, only 1.47% of electric services in the Estes Park Power and Communications service area had solar or wind net-metered systems (158 net-meters out of 10,742 registered electric meters)."

In the presentation to the Town Board on February 8, the Sustainable Energy subgroup was further divided into two sections, the second focusing on construction and buildings. Among the recommendations are requiring or incentivizing "high-performance" houses, including the use of heat pumps, electric instead of gas, and considering incentivizing building smaller homes by having "more stringent energy rating index (ERI) requirements" for unnecessarily large houses. Recommendation #9 lists eight specific practices for buildings and construction.

The Solid Waste Management subgroup makes 23 recommendations in the report. The presentation to the trustees by Lisa Hutchins utilized humor to help us see the absurdity of some of our unsustainable practices. In the introduction to their recommendations in the report the subgroup explains the four broad areas on which they focused: "1) Increasing Estes Park's recycling rate; 2) reducing the amount of trash the community sends to the Larimer County Landfill; 3) eliminating the worst single-use plastics from sale and use; and 4) conducting a program of ongoing recycling education." There is an emphasis on making the act of sustainable behavior easy, convenient and less expensive. Some recommendations would make it much more expensive to landfill when recycling is an option. The report states that Loveland, a "pay as you throw" volume-based fee community, has helped the community achieve the highest recycle rate in the state at 58%. The current recycle rate in Estes

Park is 7%. Composting and disposal of yard waste is also addressed. Suggestions not only make it easier for residential recycling, but also easier for businesses to participate. Hutchins's presentation highlighted considering the landfill as place of last resort; making it easy to transition away from plastic water bottles by making water refill stations abundant and easy to find; and promoting Estes Park branded reusable picnic sets and free reusable bags for visitors.

The Institutional Factors subgroup makes 7 recommendations, bringing the total to 51 ESTF recommendations presented to the Town Board. In its introduction the subgroup points out that the town lacks a comprehensive sustainability plan and coordinated policy. There are existing models by other Colorado mountain towns that can "provide a rich resource for Estes Park to rapidly construct its own frameworks for sustainability." They recommend an Environmental Sustainability Advisory Board, which would "coordinate with other Town advisory bodies, such as the Transportation Advisory Board and the Parks Advisory Board" on issues that may pertain jointly. The recommendations include integrating sustainability into the Town's annual strategic planning, creating an environmental Sustainability Manager position, and strengthening the framework for funding sustainability. They recommend repositioning Estes Park as a Sustainable Destination.

The Institutional Factors subgroup recommends creating a Grant Development Manager position. Estes Park received a small grant of \$15,000 in 2020 via the Colorado Renewable & Clean Energy set aside, compared to awards ranging from \$250,000 to \$650,000 to three other Colorado mountain towns in the same awards cycle. The increasing availability of state and federal funding sources makes creating a dedicated job for pursuing those opportunities an important piece of our local sustainability puzzle.

This report and its 51 recommendations for moving toward being a much more sustainable community is a good first step. This short summary only skims the surface of the well-researched, extensive content of the report. If parents and grandparents want future generations to be able to enjoy our beautiful home as much as we do, we need to take action now. As we pointed out two weeks ago, if everyone personally takes even one small step like recycling the aluminum cans we drink from, that act can make a huge difference when combined with the steps of our neighbors.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, "[Estes Park Sustainability Initiatives](https://www.eptrail.com/2022/02/09/together-we-build-estes-park-sustainability-initiatives/)", *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, February 9, 2022, <https://www.eptrail.com/2022/02/09/together-we-build-estes-park-sustainability-initiatives/>