

## Earth Day 2022 - Ending Reliance on Fossil Fuels

Together We Build, April 20, 2022

by Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

If it was not clear before the current surge in gas prices, it is certainly clear now. We must quickly wean ourselves off our fossil fuel addiction.

Sir Richard Branson recently wrote a compelling argument for European Union (EU) actions to end reliance on Russian oil and gas. (<https://www.virgin.com/branson-family/richard-branson-blog/why-business-must-end-reliance-on-russian-oil-and-gas>) He points out that the International Energy Agency (IEA) has identified coordinated action that “could reduce Europe’s reliance on Russian gas by more than a third within one year.” (<https://www.iea.org/reports/a-10-point-plan-to-reduce-the-european-unions-reliance-on-russian-natural-gas>)

Simply “lowering their thermostats by 1° C could reduce gas use by 10 billion cubic metres (bcm) within a year.” In terms of our Fahrenheit US thermostats, that would be the equivalent of lowering the temperature from 70 degrees to 68 degrees. EIA’s report states that “around 155 bcm” of gas is currently imported per year by the EU from Russia.

The EIA 10 point plan includes accelerating the deployment of new wind and solar projects; speeding up the replacement of gas boilers with heat pumps; and accelerating energy efficiency improvements in buildings and industry.

Branson refers to the RMI article *From Deep Crisis, Profound Change* (<https://rmi.org/insight/from-deep-crisis-profound-change/>) and a full report from RMI (<https://rmi.org/how-putins-war-marks-the-end-of-the-fossil-fuel-era/>) “Rather than coasting gently into a slow decline, fossil fuel demand now faces the prospect of prompt, rapid, and sustained decline, driven by three imperatives no longer at odds but now fully aligned: security, climate (and health), and economics. The energy trilemma has been solved by the synergistic pairing of efficiency with renewables.”

Here in Estes Park the report by the Sustainability Task Force (ESTF) was recently completed, and is now in the hands of our Trustees. The incoming, new Board of Trustees must act on meaningful next steps to implement as many of the recommendations as possible. The report can be found, and there is a link to submit public comment about the report’s recommendations, on the Town of Estes Park website, <https://estespark.colorado.gov/estf>.

For example, a way that our community could make a substantial contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and make a strong move away from fossil fuels, would be to dramatically increase the amount of rooftop solar from our surprising, inadequate 1.47% percent of electric services from solar and wind (when as much as 75% of our residential structures may be suitable for solar energy generation.) Town structures, like the parking structure and Town Hall, would be perfect locations for solar arrays. Incentives to businesses to install solar would be helpful.

As in the EIA recommendations for the EU, we could make meaningful strides by replacing gas furnaces with heat pumps. As a town we could require sustainability in new construction, and reward renovations which are energy smart. We should incentivize local contractors to take part in the Efficiency Works program.

Another step would be to act on the pathetic 7% recycling rate of our community and pursue implementing the means by which our neighbor Loveland has achieved their robust 58% rate, the highest in Colorado.

The report, with its 51 major recommendations, and many subdivided suggested actions, is a dense read. It is the job of our trustees, with input from their constituents, to identify ways to move forward. I urge the trustees to commit to installing at least one major solar PV project each year for the next 10 years. I also urge them to start purchasing all electric vehicles for the town’s fleet and have 90% all-electric vehicles by 2030.

One of the critical action items in the ESTF Final Report is the hiring of an Environmental Sustainability Manager position (page 29 of the report, Recommendation #48.) On page 32 of the ESTF report there is a further recommendation of creating a Grant Development Team led by a Grant Development Manager. We wrote in February 2022, from info culled from the report: “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.” (<https://www.eprail.com/2022/02/09/together-we-build-estes-park-sustainability-initiatives/>) The ROI of such positions are self-evident.

The best way to help the trustees decide which recommendations to act on quickly is to comment, participate and act. It is not clear what the town’s next steps will be. We need to prompt them to act decisively soon, not later. The planet is warming, the seas are rising, and our fire season is expanding.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, “[Earth Day 2022 Ending Reliance on Fossil Fuels](https://www.eprail.com/2022/04/21/together-we-build-earth-day-2022-ending-reliance-on-fossil-fuels/)”, *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, April 21, 2022, <https://www.eprail.com/2022/04/21/together-we-build-earth-day-2022-ending-reliance-on-fossil-fuels/>