

Estes Sustainability Report Examined Part 3

Together We Build, June 1, 2022

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We continue our dive into some of the 51 recommendations of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force (ESTF) report, continuing backwards from the final section of the report, Institutional Factors. In the last article we continued our look at the Institutional Factors section, and the recommendations to develop Climate Action Policy, strengthen the framework for funding sustainability, and establish a Clean Energy Plan. The report and a link to make comments can be found on the Town of Estes Park website. (<https://estespark.colorado.gov/estf>)

Solid Waste Management

Working backward from the end of the report, the next section of the ESTF report is Solid Waste Management, recommendations 21 thru 43. There are high profile efforts in our community to educate us with information regarding this particular topic. The recommendations in the ESTF report are concise and very easy to understand. A few of the many local resources include the League of Women Voters, and the weekly local article Eco-sense. The High School once again had a sustainability workshop this past weekend. We thank them for helping make sustainable Solid Waste Management something we can all understand and get on board with here in Estes Park. Read the ESTF recommendations for Waste Management. Reach out to the Town Trustees and ask them to act on them ASAP.

(<https://www.eprail.com/2022/05/23/learn-ways-to-keep-estes-green-at-eph>; <https://www.lwv-estespark.org/>; Estes Recycles page https://www.lwv-estespark.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=706933&module_id=385414)

Sustainable Energy

The first section of the ESTF report, Sustainable Energy, contains recommendations 1 thru 20. There are some striking statistics regarding the potential, versus reality, of solar generation here in the Estes Valley: “roughly 75% of residential structures in Estes Park may be suitable for solar energy generation. As of Nov. 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).”

Solar Opportunities and Recommendations

The report lists a number of programs that would benefit the community, many of which are already used in other Colorado communities. Colorado Solar and Storage Association (COSSA) explains the benefits of Solar Friendly Communities Program. (<https://cossa.co/solar-and-storage-friendly-communities/>) Standardized plan review software, such as SolarAPP+ (<https://solarapp.nrel.gov/>) “can run compliance checks and process building permit approvals for eligible rooftop solar systems: Integrates with existing government software; Automated plan review, permit approval, and project tracking; Standardizes up to 90% of standard system plans; Inspection checklist verification and final sign-off after installation.” The ESTF report cites an example of a Colorado community that has benefited from such programs. “Steamboat Springs significantly increased residential solar generation by attaining a Solsmart “silver” designation, while reducing their solar permitting fee to \$0 and limiting the permitting process to five working days.” (<https://solsmart.org/>)

The 26% federal tax incentives have been extended through 2022 (they reduce to 22% in 2023 and expire completely at the close of 2023). The cost of solar installation has declined by roughly a factor of three over the past ten years, “while solar panels have become more efficient and reliable.” The report recommends Estes Park “follow examples set by Fort Collins, Nederland , and Boulder County by making available \$1,000 solar installation grants for those with qualifying financial status.”

(<https://www.fcgov.com/utilities/residential/renewables/solar-rebates>)

The report discusses some options for incentivizing commercial solar projects, and the possibilities of battery storage, in particular for use as “microgrids”, which would be helpful in emergencies and to stabilize the main power grid.

The installation of photovoltaic (PV) on the Town’s properties, such as the Event Center, the Pavilion, Visitor Center, Parking Garage, Museum, and on land, such as the closed landfill site on Elm Road, present opportunities that could power hundreds of resident’s homes. “An important advantage would be having energy produced locally, as opposed to being dependent completely on a distant source. In this regard, the [Platte River Power Authority] PRPA has recently issued a Request for Proposals (RFP), a portion of which calls for the creation of up to 250 MW of new solar generating capacity.” The bid proposals are currently under review. (<https://www.prpa.org/financial-information/contract-administration/>)

Solar Generation on Schools

The report notes that although our Estes Park schools are not a part of Town governance, that schools present an excellent opportunity for solar generation in our community. The report mentions that “Two groups of local high school students and their instructors, supported by the Estes Park Education Foundation, are currently considering a “feasibility study” for putting solar generation on Estes Park school buildings.” We could not find information about this study on the Estes Park Education Foundation website. (<https://www.epeducationfoundation.org/current-project>) Integrating studies for sustainability solutions into our education system will be key to helping young leaders provide hope to their peers and future generations.

Examples of school districts enhancing the staff and services they provide using the energy savings generated by installation of solar are noted in the ESTF report. The availability of financial support in Colorado for grants is also mentioned.

Hydro Power

The Estes Valley has the resources in place to consider storage options and emergency use of our lakes, Lake Estes and Mary’s Lake. The report details these ideas and makes recommendations to explore them, such as using solar PV to provide electricity to pump water from Lake Estes back up to Mary’s Lake to store water (like a battery) to then produce hydroelectricity when the local grid needs it. Other hydro projects in the Estes Valley should be pursued by our Light and Power Department.

Tell the Town to Take Action

The ESTF report, a massive effort written by a dedicated team of local volunteers, was delivered to the Town of Estes Park board of trustees in January 2022, nearly six months ago. It is a comprehensive tool for the town to use to pursue meaningful action. As community members we need to insist that the report represent only a first step to the actions the town must take to address our town’s sustainability now and for future residents and visitors. If the town is acting on these recommendations we should insist upon transparency and publicity in how these recommendations are being pursued.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, “[Estes Sustainability Report Examined Part 3](https://www.eptail.com/2022/06/01/together-we-build-estes-sustainability-report-examined-part-3/)”, *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, June 1, 2022, <https://www.eptail.com/2022/06/01/together-we-build-estes-sustainability-report-examined-part-3/>