

Estes Sustainability Report Examined Part 4

Together We Build, June 15, 2022

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Wrapping up our series looking into some of the 51 recommendations of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force (ESTF) report, we continue with our look at the first section, Sustainable Energy, and recommendations #8 through #20. The report and a link to make comments can be found on the Town of Estes Park website. (<https://estepark.colorado.gov/estf>)

Building Sustainability

Encouraging behaviors which save energy, and taking steps to improve the sustainability of existing buildings can go a long way toward reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions we need to cut in order to stop and perhaps reverse climate change. “According to the Colorado State University (CSU) Extension, beneficial behavior and making a house more energy efficient can reduce energy bills and associated emissions by upwards of 20-30%. This may include simple things like turning off electrical appliances when not in use, employing LED lighting, dialing down the heating temperature in winter or dialing up the cooling temperature in summer, and washing clothes in cold water.” The report references checklists both by CSU, and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL).

(<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/family-home-consumer/energy-checklist-for-homeowners-10-621/>, and <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy14osti/61628.pdf>)

A resource we need to encourage improved access to is the Efficiency Works program. Our local access has been limited, and we recently received a flyer, via our home electric bill from the Town, for a rebate on recycling large appliances a day after the expiration date. (<https://efficiencyworks.org/>) The program provides reasonably priced energy audits to help identify ways that homeowners can improve their carbon footprint.

New Building Construction

“Estes Park has adopted a number of widely recognized building codes, like the International Building Code [IBC], the International Residential Code [IRC], and the International Energy Conservation Code [IECC]. These codes, as amended, are well regarded, but there is considerable room for improvement.” The Town of Estes Park is currently using the 2015 version of the international codes. The Building Department is looking at adopting the new 2021 IBC, IRC, and IECC by the end of 2022. Thomas would like to encourage fellow Architects, Engineers, builders, and contractors to get familiar with these new codes, and to propose amendments if you disagree with new fire or energy provisions of these codes. Our Chief Building Official has provided time once a month to meet. Please come and join in these discussions.

The report continues “The Town of Basalt, in coordination with Holy Cross Energy, has been employing highly sustainable, high-performance, all-renewable-electric building practices, and Estes Park in coordination with our utility and PRPA should consider similar initiatives.”

(<https://www.holycross.com/basalt-vista-affordable-housing-project/>) The project is providing 27 families with all-electric homes in duplexes and triplexes. “With NO natural gas line in the community; this is the first all-electric Net-Zero community in rural Colorado.” The homes will “generate as much electricity as they use, with electric bills likely to be at 85% less than a typical electric bill.” They will be air-tight, well insulated and include energy efficient window and doors. The educational opportunities for training and research, as well as the partnerships in funding the project, are well worth looking to for inspiration. This includes the Town of Basalt reducing fees and contributing “\$30,000 to help get to Net-Zero.” As another example the report also points to a Fort Collins project, Revive Properties.

(<https://revivefc.com/features/>)

The building recommendations for community development are subdivided into 8 points under recommendation #9. These include requiring high-performance houses (#9.1) which should be encouraged by incentives such as “reduced permit fees and rebates on efficient water heaters and other

appliances” and to “make it as easy and affordable as possible for homeowners, architects, designers, and builders to choose sustainable materials, lighting, appliances, and finishes in new and remodel projects.” Transitioning to electric and eliminating gas hook-ups are healthier and safer (#9.2) and cities such as Denver are phasing out gas hook-ups. Heat pumps as alternatives to gas furnaces and water heaters (#9.3) and taking advantage of new products such as a new white paint that “absorbs less heat than it reflects” should be encouraged. Making sure homes are pre-wired and ready for solar installation (#9.4), equipped with 200A service for EV charging (#9.5) and incentivizing building smaller homes (#9.6). Water saving features (#9.7) and reconsidering the use of hot tubs (#9.8) are discussed.

Vehicles and Equipment Electrification

Recommendation #10 encourages the Town to convert the police vehicles to EVs, and lists quite a number of benefits in performance, financial and environmental considerations. #11 would require vendor contracts to convert to electric for Town projects. #12 encompasses establishing incentives for residential conversion to EVs, including electric rates and parking perks. #13 calls for expansion of the Public EV Charging capacity. #14 encourages initiating conversations with Rocky Mountain National Park to install EV chargers.

For residential charging, #15 suggests “Include installation of a NEMA14-50 AC garage outlet in the building code for new single family residential homes.” This should add less than \$100 to the construction cost. #16 suggests requiring installation of “one Level 2 AC charger for every three housing units for multi-unit rental housing,” preferably including retrofitting existing units.

Recommendations #17, 18 and 19 encompass power tools “such as weed trimmers, edgers, lawn mowers, snow blowers and to forestry tools such as chainsaws and pruners.” As the opening paragraph of this section states, “Small two-cycle motors emit much more harmful air pollutants and noise pollution than larger four-cycle motors on a per unit basis.” We found this 2022 article detailing this fact. “According to the EPA, off-road gasoline-powered equipment, such as lawn mowers and leaf blowers, emit approximately 242 million tons of pollutants annually, just as much as cars and homes [combined].” (<https://www.pressherald.com/2022/03/31/our-sustainable-city-lawnmowers-emit-as-much-pollution-as-a-car/>)

Multi-Modal Transportation

Finally in the Sustainable Energy section, the report says “A multi-modal transportation network is an essential feature of an environmentally sustainable community. It reduces climate-warming greenhouse gases by providing safe and accessible alternative transportation options for both residents and visitors to get around town.” Actions to improve the availability of sidewalks, trails, and alternatives to individual automobile operation are sorely needed in our community.

Tell the Town to Take Action

As previously stated, 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, 5 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.

Please take the time to read the full report and make comments to the Town to encourage adoption of the recommendations.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build. “Estes Sustainability Report Examined Part 4” , *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, June 15, 2022, <https://www.eprail.com/2022/06/14/together-we-build-estes-sustainability-report-examined-part-4/>