

Town of Estes Actions on the ESTF Report

Together We Build, June 28, 2022

by Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Over 4000 human hours (aka man hours) just in meetings alone were spent by the volunteer women and men of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force, meeting over 20 times over the course of 5 months for 1 to 2 hours per meeting. This did not include the “homework” done by each of these dedicated citizen volunteers. On June 14th, in the Town Board Study Session, a brief two paragraphs describe the actions the Town of Estes Park intends to take in 2022-2023. The minutes of the June 14 study session can be found in the packet for the Town Board Meeting of June 28, the ESTF report paragraphs appearing on page 8.

(<https://dms.estes.org/weblink/0/edoc/123426/PACKET%20Town%20Board.pdf>). We notice the use of many non-action terms like “study”, “consider”, “encourage”, “monitor and research” and “prepare a report”. Direct quote from the minutes follows:

“ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE – STAFF RECOMMENDED

IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS. Assistant Town Administrator Damweber stated the Executive Leadership Team and other staff members have reviewed the recommendations presented by the Environmental Sustainability Task Force and developed a list of focused action items that can be accomplish in 2023 with the existing staff, although additional funding may be necessary. The list consists of reviewing current codes to update code language to incorporate sustainability and resiliency, incentivizing other energy sources, encourage recycling, working with Platte River Power Authority on electric rates, and distributed energy, additional electric charges and parking incentives for EVs, implementation of the Colorado Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, prepare a report on the effectiveness of the Complete Streets Policy, create zero- waste guidelines for event organizers, slash removal and management, monitor and research feasibility of capturing methane gas for energy use at the landfill, continue participation in Climate Smart Larimer County efforts, and consider a green fleet and equipment policy. Staff would periodically revisit the report to determine if additional recommendations can be implemented as circumstances change.

The Board requested the recommendations be added to the 2023 Strategic Plan as one item to reference. The Board suggested the Task Force be reconvened in 5 to 10 years to review and update the recommendations. The Board stated appreciation for the work staff has done to bring forward a comprehensive list of items to be completed in 2023.”

The 2nd paragraph above suggests that “the Task Force be reconvened in 5 to 10 years....” If you were a member of the Task Force and the result of your herculean efforts to make 51 very specific, action oriented recommendations to steer the Town of Estes Park to impactful sustainability behaviors in 2022 and beyond was the above, would you volunteer again??

The ESTF report can be found on the Town of Estes Park website.

(<https://estespark.colorado.gov/estf>)

Platte River Power Authority plans

This week we received an email from Gordon McAlpine, one of the ESTF members, regarding comments he has sent to the Town Board for the June 28th meeting. Unable to attend in person, he reached out to those of us who are invested in halting the climate change our current behaviors are accelerating. His comments to the Board are “to comment about PRPA’s continued burning of fossil fuels.” His comments refer to a Sierra Club press release with the heading “PRPA vote derails prior commitment to 100% carbon-free electricity by 2030” points out that “PRPA is now the only utility in Colorado with plans to build new, permanent fossil-fuel-powered generation”

Gordon’s complete email to the Trustees can be read in our elected officials’ public email:

<https://groups.google.com/a/estes.org/g/elected-officials-public-email/c/1i-CZDKFWp8>

PRPA hired Siemens to investigate the concept of a “new natural gas plant that could be purchased from Siemens.” In other words, PRPA is proposing replacing the coal powered plant closing by 2030, with a plant powered by fracking, and asking the potential beneficiary of this business to give unbiased advice. Siemen’s projections “ for battery costs are significantly higher than those put forth by reputable organizations like the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL in Golden)”. Further, “In 2018, teams of municipality stakeholders met with PRPA staff to discuss distributed energy resources and sophisticated computer models. Unfortunately, those stakeholders were totally disregarded.” Gordon McAlpine’s comments go on to say, “In order to combat overwhelming public objections to new, polluting, unneeded fossil fuel purchases, PRPA developed a so-called "scientific survey." Only one question mentioned energy production, and RICE engines were not mentioned at all. The one energy question is shown below [in his email to the Trustees], as submitted by a business in Fort Collins. Based on this, PRPA announced that the stakeholders favor natural-gas burning RICE engines.”

Drilling for natural gas, “fracked gas”, produces lots of methane that is released into the atmosphere. When you consider these harmful effects, natural gas is no better than burning coal. We need more solar and new batteries which are cost effective.

In the packet for the June 28th town board meeting (tonight as we write this) one of the reports and discussion items is a Platte River Power Authority Update. The packet for the meeting contains the materials PRPA is putting forward for their report (packet pages 59 to 71). In their “about” page PRPA claims to support a “sustainable energy future” and tout “environmentally responsible and financially sustainable energy” in their Mission Statement. Their projected system total chart shows coal as 52.7% of all sources, with Natural Gas at .1%. Solar is a paltry 2.3%. They plan to add reciprocating internal combustion engines (RICE), to replace the coal plants, and somehow, despite this “upgrade” to fossil fuels, they think that they will achieve 94% reduction in CO2 by 2030.

Tell the Town to Take Action

The rate at which the town is “considering” and preparing yet more reports, to be revisited 5 years hence, guarantees that our lovely little community will not even come close to meeting 2030 climate goals. We have heard that suggestions have been made to make the recommended Sustainability Manager position someone affiliated with PRPA. We strongly disagree, and suggest that our town get serious about sustainability by hiring a Sustainability Manager independent of Larimer County’s “largest source of climate-change-producing greenhouse gases” which is PRPA.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, [Town of Estes actions on the ESTF Report](https://www.eptrail.com/2022/06/29/town-of-estes-actions-on-the-estf-report/), *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, June 29, 2022, <https://www.eptrail.com/2022/06/29/town-of-estes-actions-on-the-estf-report/>