

## Say No to PRPA Fossil Fuel Plans and Yes to A Sustainability Manager

Together We Build, October 18, 2023

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Why does Estes Park need a sustainability manager? One reason would be just to keep up with the massive amount of double speak coming from PRPA. We are, of course, talking about the recent blitz of community engagement that the Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) has been doing. The Town Board meeting of September 26, at which PRPA made a presentation, was dominated by the zoning issue that has been looming large in our community. The successful influence campaign of our neighbors here in Estes Park to prevent a project they did not want to live with is proof positive of the power of people to make or prevent change if they choose to. It is a shame that environmental concerns which will affect the quality of life for generations to come can't get the massive amount of proactive and reactive energy that a single residential development project did.

We read in the minutes of the Town Board meeting of September 26 that the Town Administrator reported that "Environmental Sustainability Manager was not included in the budget to be presented to the Board because no ongoing expenses could be funded." In answer to our email (from Laura Beck) Tuesday 10/17/23 to the Town Administrator, Mayor and Trustees asking about this, the Mayor responded "At this time staff department heads have been handling the environmental sustainability for each department. I believe the trustees are looking forward to funding hiring an individual in 2025."

The minutes of the September 26 meeting have a brief summary of the PRPA presentation, and our attempts to view the recording of the meeting were frustrated by technical issues in the recording and/or streaming. We were able to access the power point slides in the EP Town Board meeting packet available on the town's website.

It is our understanding that the PRPA is asking its Board of Directors, which includes our Mayor Wendy Koenig, to approve funding to build a natural gas/methane power plant. Estes Park's other PRPA board member is also the PRPA board chair. Reuben Bergsten is the Director of utilities for the Town of Estes Park and is a major advocate of the new gas power plant. When you consider the methane and other gases that are off gassed in the production of natural gas how much cleaner is natural gas than coal? Not much. Therefore, is it a good economic and environmental decision to shut down Rawhide coal plant just to build a new gas fired power plant? If we are going to solve this environmental crisis we have to stop burning all fossil fuels at some point. We need to quit kicking the can down the road and do it now. Xcel Energy is proposing to go with battery back-up storage. Why can't PRPA?

It has been brought to our attention that the PRPA presentations to the communities have actually differed in factual content. For example, we have been told that the slides presented to Estes Park versus those presented to Fort Collins differed by 8 percent in the projected year 2030 amount of non-carbon energy generation by PRPA, with the rosier picture of 88% being presented at our local presentations. In another municipality presentation PRPA did discuss the new request for funding the gas burning plant, but not here in Estes Park. We have been told that during the upcoming PRPA Board meeting there will be an up or down vote for the new gas power plant. By slipping this into the agenda now, it is said the PRPA will not have to justify it during the new Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) in 2024, which has to be approved by an outside organization. We assume the published agenda or packet for this upcoming October 26 PRPA board meeting will be available a week before, as meeting materials for the 9/28 meeting show up in the town emails on 9/21. We suggest that before that meeting, before the morning of October 26, 2023, you contact the PRPA board to let them know that adding new fossil fuel plants to our energy mix is unacceptable. (<https://www.prpa.org/about-prpa/leadership/board-meetings/> email contact the board via the board secretary at [boardsecretary@prpa.org](mailto:boardsecretary@prpa.org).) Please note also that our elected officials have publicly accessible emails through the town website, and that one can search and read the email conversations. Our search of "bergsten" yielded a number of comments,

some pro and mostly con, by the public about the PRPA plans. One dated September 27 from Don Sellers to the PRPA board includes links to detailed information about battery alternatives and the Xcel plans.

We have addressed the Environmental Sustainability Manager question before, in some detail, in prior issues of the EP Trail Gazette. On June 29, 2022, we wrote about “Town of Estes actions on the ESTF Report” in which we went into a great amount of detail about the PRPA plans to add a new natural gas plant, “making it the only utility in Colorado with plans to build new, permanent fossil-fuel-powered generation.” (<https://www.eptail.com/2022/06/29/town-of-estes-actions-on-the-estf-report/>)

On March 22, 2023, we wrote “When Will Estes Park Hire A Sustainability Manager?” In that article we went into detail about the benefits of being a “Sustainable Destination” and compared our town’s efforts to those of other Colorado mountain tourist destinations.

(<https://www.eptail.com/2023/03/22/when-will-estes-park-hire-a-sustainability-manager/>)

We also wrote in “Action is Our Only Option for a Habitable Future” in which we stress the many ways large and small that we can take action to slow our advance toward an uninhabitable planet. Waiting until 2025 should not be an option. (<https://www.eptail.com/2023/08/09/together-we-build-action-is-our-only-option-for-a-habitable-future/>)

The power of voters and the community to influence change was recently in full view here in Estes Park. Now we need to rally as a community and loudly say no to PRPA doubling down on fossil fuels when our future is at stake.

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