How is Estes Park Doing on that Sustainability Checklist?

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By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Thomas was one of the Estes Park citizens who volunteered their time to craft the Environmental Sustainability Task Force (ESTF) Report, submitted to the town in February 2022. We have written several times in follow up to educate Estes Park about the suggested actions, and to examine what our town is doing with the recommendations. Our previous articles can be found on our TW Beck Architects website "About Us" page, and at the Estes Park Trail Gazette. The first one, published February 9, 2022, is an overview of the entire ESTF Report. (https://www.eptrail.com/2022/02/09/together-we-build-estes-park-sustainability-initiatives/ )

To date the Town of Estes Park has not put solar on one single building. Thomas encouraged them to install solar panels on the shop building on Elm Road when it was built in the 1990s. 30 years later there is still no active solar. At least that building was designed with passive solar. The shop was built into the hillside with south facing windows and garage doors with windows. But no PV panels yet? Think about the ROI that could have been if the town had not been timid about investing in our energy future. It seems there are a few people in our town government that just really do not like solar PV. They have resisted it for years. It would save money now that solar, wind and PV are the cheapest forms of power. Batteries now solve the storage problem, so let's get off the fossil fuels!

Meanwhile, the Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) "is planning on building a 200 Megawatt gas turbine plant." Although the plant was approved by the state and by Larimer County, a lawsuit was filed to prevent its construction. (https://www.larimerallianceblog.org/update-on-the-prpa-turbines-were-not-giving-up/; https://ncalf.org/home/action-alerts/) According to our Google search "the lawsuit filed in late May 2026 is still ongoing and has not reached a final outcome or ruling." The permit remains valid, and PRPA can continue pre-construction activities.

As we write this article 45.4% of PRPA energy production is from coal. (https://prpa.org/energy-production/) Natural Gas is not a sustainable alternative.

Other sustainable energy options have recently become available. Innovative geothermal power plants are already generating electricity in Utah. According to the September 24, 2026, press release from Fervo Energy, their Cape Station flagship geothermal development in Beaver County, Utah, is the "First greenfield Enhanced Geothermal Systems (EGS) project synchronized to the grid and exporting electricity (First Power); Industry-leading milestone validates EGS as a scalable source of 24/7 carbon-free power; Marks the first megawatts of a multi-gigawatt development, with 900 MW fully contracted and more than 4 GW of capacity." The Fervo press release states that this marks the first time a utility-scale enhanced geothermal development has reached this milestone anywhere in the world. (https://fervoenergy.com/fervo-energy-achieves-first-power-at-cape-station-a-landmark-moment-for-the-future-of-enhanced-geothermal-systems/ ) A very informative primer is available from Utah Clean Energy. (https://utahcleanenergy.org/geothermal-primer-part-1/) For context, 4 GW of capacity can power over 3 million average homes.

So why don't we have our local power company drill some holes and produce local non-fossil fuel power from geothermal? It is now proven technology. The large capital expenditure will pay huge dividends in the future. F.O. Stanly did it over 125 years ago when he built a hydroelectric plant on Fall River and powered the Stanley Hotel with its all electric kitchen!

Let's power our electricity with a geothermal power plant. Or at least install PV solar panels on the new police station carport and also the roof of the building. The new police building could then power all electric police vehicles. The hybrid electric vehicles they have invested in so far are not a great choice. No savings in the maintenance and poor performance in acceleration and speed of the vehicle. Most all electric EVs get 300 miles on a charge. That should be plenty for a patrol car shift in Estes Park. And the zero to 60 mph acceleration of standard EVs averages 3 to 4 seconds.

The town has followed through on some of the sustainability checklist. Let's make sure that some of the bigger ticket items like our power grid sources are not neglected.

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