

Climate Task Force Recommendations are Affordable and Realistic

The Climate Task Force was established in May of 2007 as a result of a council resolution initiated by the Fort Collins Sustainability Group that called for updating the city's 1999 Climate Protection Plan. On Tuesday, February 26th, the Climate Task Force presented its draft recommendations for achieving the Fort Collins 2010 greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal to City Council. The story appearing the next day in the Coloradoan and the "Our View" editorial appearing on Friday, February 29th both suggested that the Climate Task Force's recommendations are neither affordable nor realistic. Both of these assertions are incorrect.

First, the Coloradoan latched onto the \$14.7 Million implementation cost developed by the task force and pronounced that the city "just does not have that kind of money available." However, much of that cost (\$10.6 Million) would go for installing "smart meters" over a seven year period that will allow utility customers to track their electric usage in real time. The meters would be paid for by an increase in electric rates, so there would be no impact on the city's general fund.

The next biggest ticket item in the implementation budget, \$2.7 Million, would go towards increasing energy efficiency programs, such as installing compact fluorescent lamps and programmable thermostats, above existing levels. This item would also be paid for by increasing electric rates. Additionally, there would be an annual general fund contribution of about \$500,000 for this measure, some of which may be paid by state grants.

Customers of Ft. Collins Utilities could take advantage of smart meters and increased energy efficiency programs to realize significant savings on their electric bills. The estimated annual city-wide savings for these two measures is \$3.7 million, which results in a simple payback on the implementation cost of about 3.6 years. These two measures are eminently affordable both to the city and utility customers, and represent an excellent investment by utility customers in lowering their electric bills.

Second, the Coloradoan called for "more realistic approaches" to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The February 26th story failed to analyze a statement made by Mayor Doug Hutchinson that compared the city's 30% reduction goal by 2010 to the State of Colorado's 20% reduction goal by 2020. The state's goal is to decrease emissions by 20% with respect to actual 2005 emissions. The city's goal is to decrease emissions by 30% with respect to the "worst case scenario" for 2010. This equates to a reduction of only about 4% with respect to actual 2006 emissions. This is certainly a realistic goal, despite the short time horizon.

Climate scientists are telling us that we will need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 50 – 80% with respect to current levels by mid-century in order to avoid the worst consequences of global climate change. Those "worst consequences" include melting of the polar ice caps and an attendant sea level rise that would inundate many of the world's largest cities and important agricultural areas. We have no time to lose. People need to insist that governments at all levels - local, state, and federal - begin taking significant actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Media outlets like the Coloradoan can help by reporting and editorializing accurately both on the problem of global climate change and on proposed solutions to that problem.

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