Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 97, No. 4, October 2021

COLORADO'S MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC UTILITIES LEAD THE WAY IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY PROGRAMS

Colorado has 28 municipal electric systems that serve approximately 17% of the state's population.

A KEY OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLY MANAGING OUR WATER RESOURCES

In 2015, the Colorado Water Plan set a goal that by 2025, 75% of Coloradoans would be living in communities that incorporate water-saving actions into their land-use planning. While a lofty goal at the time, more and more communities in Colorado are beginning to do just that by integrating their land use and water planning.

MEETING SUSTAINABILITY GOALS WILL REQUIRE SMARTER CITIES

Smart cities use new technology, data, and partnership as tools to approach complex problems, and few issues are more complicated than achieving truly sustainable communities.

SUSTAINABILITY EDITION

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The Colorado Municipal League is a nonprofit association organized and operated by Colorado municipalities to provide support services to member cities and towns. The League has two main objectives: 1) to represent cities and towns collectively in matters before the state and federal government; and 2) to provide a wide range of information services to help municipal officials manage their governments.

MISSION

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

Letters to the editor

Have thoughts about an article that you read in *Colorado Municipalities*?

Want to share those thoughts with your colleagues across the state?

CML welcomes thought-provoking letters to the editor! Send comments to CML Training and Marketing Specialist Makenna Sturgeon at *msturgeon@cml.org.*

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Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 5,000 municipal officials and decision makers. To reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns, contact CML Training and Marketing Specialist Makenna Sturgeon at 303-831-6411 or *msturgeon@cml.org.*

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For associate membership information, contact CML Training and Marketing Specialist Makenna Sturgeon at *msturgeon@cml.org*.

About some of our contributors

Sandi Aguilar has been the customer relations program manager for Castle Rock Water for the past six years. Aguilar has kept the community's residents informed and engaged about the milestone efforts in creating a safe and reliable water service. Her experience with community building as a chamber of commerce director and with media development as a radio and newspaper manager provided the background to develop videos, open houses, landscape giveaway contests, surveys, and website platforms to have the community cheering the accomplishments and feeling confident that Castle Rock has a strong and sustainable water future.

Kate Bailey is the policy and research director at Eco-Cycle and the national policy coordinator for the Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers.

Greg Baker is the manager for Aurora Water Public Relations. He oversees a nationally recognized water conservation team and award-winning environmental education group.

Ray Beck retired from Yampa Valley Electric Association on March 30, 2009, after 37 years of service. Beck was elected to the Craig City Council in 2007 and served two consecutive four-year terms and one two-year term as the mayor of Craig. Beck was elected as a Moffat County commissioner for District II in November of 2016 and took the oath of office on Jan. 10, 2017.

Beck served on various boards and commissions over the last 14 years, including the Craig Moffat Airport Advisory Board and the Yampa Valley Airport Commission for eight years. He was appointed by Gov. Hickenlooper to the Colorado Aeronautical Board in 2014 and again in 2017. He has served in various leadership roles including the past chairman to the CAB, an advisory board to the CDOT Division of Aeronautics. Beck is a past member of the Colorado Northwestern Community College Foundation Board and is an alumni from the class of 1970. He sits on the Executive Board for CLUB 20 as the membership chair and has held that position for the last 11 years. He was also the liaison for the Moffat County Board of County Commissioners to Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (and past chairman) representing issues that are important to Craig and northwest Colorado.

John Berggren is a water policy analyst for Western Resource Advocates, where he works to advance water conservation and efficiency policies at the state and local levels by engaging with municipalities, water managers, state officials, and other stakeholders throughout the region. Much of this work is at the intersection of water and land use planning with the hopes of helping communities become as water efficient as possible. John serves on the City of Boulder's Water Resources Advisory Board, is a member of the Colorado Water and Land Use Planning Alliance, and is certified as a Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL). He has a PhD in environmental studies and water policy from the University of Colorado at Boulder, a MHS degree in environmental health sciences from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and a BA in public health from Johns Hopkins University.

Kayla Betzold is the sustainability coordinator for the City of Wheat Ridge, managing the city's environmental sustainability programs for residents and businesses. Kayla is the staff liaison to Sustainable Wheat Ridge, a volunteer resident advisory committee, and works with the committee to develop and implement projects that support sustainability goals outlined in the city's Sustainability Action Plan. Kayla has a B.S. in environmental science and has been working in municipal government on the Front Range for the past five years, implementing education, community engagement, and sustainability programs for residents and businesses in Boulder, Larimer, and Jefferson Counties. Kayla lives in Arvada with her husband and two children and enjoys hiking, biking, and house plants!

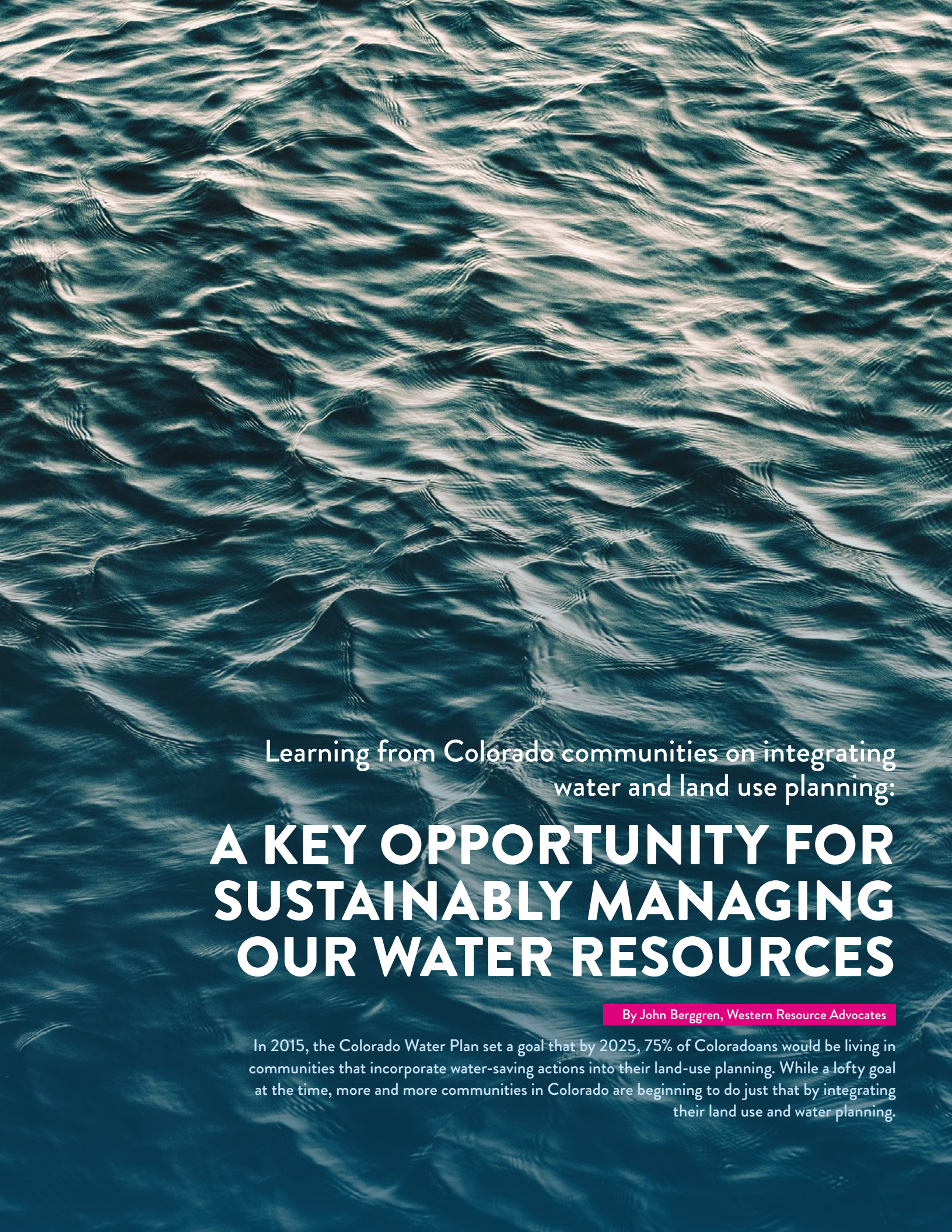
Christine Brinker is an energy efficiency policy expert at the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP), a nonprofit advancing energy efficiency and clean transportation in CO, AZ, NV, NM, UT, and WY. She works in SWEEP's Buildings Efficiency program, where she specializes in commercial building energy efficiency, including high performance and net zero buildings, benchmarking and transparency, state and local policies, beneficial electrification, appliance standards, and commercial building energy code adoption and compliance. She's been with SWEEP for 15 years, and before that worked at ESOURCE advising utilities on clean energy technologies and distributed energy strategy. She graduated summa cum laude with distinction with a BA in economics and environmental policy from the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she focused on clean energy economics and sustainable energy policy.

Kirk Longstein leads the continued planning and implementation of commercial and residential building energy scoring programs, including the Fort Collins Epic HOMES performance improvement certificate, and Real Estate Ally networks. Prior to joining the Fort Collins team, Kirk served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Malawi and as the agency's Sustainability Program Manager from its Washington, D.C. headquarters. Through a portfolio of projects addressing new climate policies, Kirk has facilitated programs with a focus on aligning social, cultural, and personal values with conservation efforts. Kirk is an AICP-certified planner. He holds a master of science degree in natural resources and environmental sciences from the University of Illinois and a bachelor of science in geography from Northern Illinois University.

Rachel Setzke is the senior policy and research associate at Eco-Cycle.

Tyler Svitak is the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance executive director. Svitak has built his career solving problems at the intersection of technology and urbanism. Svitak has held strategic roles advancing electric, connected, and automated mobility initiatives at the City and County of Denver, Colorado Department of Transportation, and American Lung Association in Colorado, where he led or contributed to some of the most innovative smart mobility projects and policies in the country. Svitak became the executive director of the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance in 2019, which is the first and only statewide coalition of public, private, academic, and research organizations committed to advancing smart cities initiatives across sectors and jurisdictions. Svitak leads the membership-based organization as it develops a new model for building smarter communities and regions. The Alliance manages a portfolio of projects that leverage innovative technologies, like 5G, to improve challenges facing the state through partnership and real-world deployment. Tyler has been leading the Alliance's role in AvCo, the nation's largest low-speed automated shuttle deployment aimed at improving public transit.

Jonathan Wachtel is the sustainability manager for the City of Lakewood. Jonathan is the innovator and creator of the Sustainable Neighborhoods Program, developing it in Lakewood in 2012. In 2015, under Jonathan's leadership, the city adopted its first city-wide sustainability plan. Jonathan's work has been recognized with numerous awards, including awards from both the Colorado and national chapters of the American Planning Association and the Harvard Kennedy School for Innovations in American Government. Most recently, Jonathan is excited about the Dunstan Middle School science class that dedicated an entire semester to studying the City of Lakewood Sustainability Plan in order to write a kid-friendly version with artwork, photography, and action steps for kids. The City of Lakewood Sustainability Plan for Kids was recognized with a community engagement award from the Colorado APA in the fall of 2019.



Learning from Colorado communities on integrating water and land use planning:

A KEY OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLY MANAGING OUR WATER RESOURCES

By John Berggren, Western Resource Advocates

In 2015, the Colorado Water Plan set a goal that by 2025, 75% of Coloradoans would be living in communities that incorporate water-saving actions into their land-use planning. While a lofty goal at the time, more and more communities in Colorado are beginning to do just that by integrating their land use and water planning.

So why should communities care about integrating water and land use planning, and why are more communities starting to take action? Well for one, water in Colorado is a limited resource and communities are coming up against the limits of those available supplies, especially with climate change. Additionally, Colorado—particularly the Front Range—is growing incredibly fast.

Expansive population growth with limited water supplies has always been a challenge, but by integrating water into land use planning, that growth can be done in a much more water efficient way. By improving water and land use management at all scales, from comprehensive plans and water master plans, to zoning and landscape codes, to development review processes, and more, Colorado communities can move toward a more sustainable relationship with their water resources. Not to mention that requiring water efficient growth as it happens is much more cost effective than retrofitting existing developments in the future. Given all this, integrating these two processes is an effective step that communities can take to improve sustainability.

While many communities are moving to integrate their water and land use planning, many communities still are not. To better understand why, in 2020, Western Resource Advocates and the WaterNow Alliance conducted 24 interviews with water providers, land use planners, and elected officials from nine Colorado communities. The goal was to better understand existing water and growth-related challenges, priorities, opportunities, and experiences, and then share those lessons learned with other Colorado communities. Below are some of the key lessons learned from those interviews.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several of the communities interviewed have agricultural economies and elected leaders in particular were concerned about the potential for buy-and-dry (i.e., municipalities buy agricultural water rights leading to that farm land being taken out of production). Buy-and-dry typically occurs when growing municipalities are looking to purchase additional water supplies to meet those growth demands. Integrating water and land use planning and ensuring any new growth requires significantly less water means that there will be less demand for municipalities to buy additional supplies.

Another key finding is that elected officials' priorities really do matter. Many land use planners and water providers reported they are greatly guided by those priorities identified at the elected level. If those priorities do not include integrating water and land use planning, staff can be constrained in taking on a new endeavor. If those priorities do include water and growth, that can provide staff with the direction and authority to begin to make water efficiency improvements to their development process.

Several interviewees noted that they knew what they wanted to do, but were just waiting for the politics to be right and receive direction from their elected leaders. Relatedly, several interviewees noted the importance of educating elected officials on these topics (and several elected officials expressed appreciation about being educated). In one community, the water provider gives a "water presentation" to every new city council following an election. This is a great way to get newly elected leaders up to speed on the water and growth challenges within their community.

Similarly, and given staff constraints with time and resources, multiple planners and water providers expressed gratitude that their elected officials strongly encouraged staff to pursue external support for these initiatives, including outside funds, grants, trainings, and workshops. Again, the staff reported knowing what they wanted to achieve, and they were greatly appreciative of their elected officials not only being supportive of efforts to integrate water and land use planning, but also giving them the latitude and encouragement to go out and secure those resources.

Given that historically land use planning and water planning have occurred separately, one great step for communities to begin the integration process is to simply establish regular meetings and opportunities for land use planners and water utility staff to discuss any actions, goals, challenges, and priorities facing each department. Simply knowing what each other is up to is a great start for identifying more specific ways to bring these processes together. In one community interviewed, the planners and water providers always met before city council meetings, using those meetings where folks would be attending anyway as an opportunity to begin these conversations.

These are just a couple of the key findings from this work, but hopefully they illuminate some opportunities for communities to improve their sustainability when it comes to water and growth.

For more information about water and land use planning integration, contact the author, John Berggren at *john.berggren@westernresources.org*. A full white paper detailing the results of these interviews can be found at : *bit.ly/2VP08cM*.

Colorado takes huge step forward to reduce

PLASTIC POLLUTION, MORE BIG CHANGES AFOOT

By Randy Moorman and Kate Bailey, Eco-Cycle

On July 6, 2021, Governor Polis signed the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act (HB21-1162) into law. This policy will eliminate some of the most polluting single-use plastics including plastic bags and polystyrene food containers.

Effective January 2023, retailers will charge a $0.10 fee on paper and plastic carry out bags at large grocery and retail stores (small businesses are excluded). Starting in January 2024, those same retailers will not be permitted to provide plastic carry-out bags to customers and restaurants will be prohibited from using polystyrene food containers and cups. Also, in January 2024, local governments will be able to pass their own legislation to adopt bans, fees or other policies to mitigate plastic pollution. Colorado is the first state in the U.S. to repeal this ban, or preemption, on local government regulations for plastics.

This policy is a tremendous step forward to reducing single-use plastic packaging, but there are other big changes needed to address plastic pollution and waste, and its burden on Colorado's health, environment, and economy. Eco-Cycle supports the vision of the New Plastics Economy, developed by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, that identifies three core strategies to address plastic waste and pollution:

- Eliminate all problematic and unnecessary plastic items.
- Innovate to ensure that the plastics we do need are reusable, recyclable, or compostable.
- Circulate all the plastic items we use to keep them in the economy and out of the environment.

Let's explore what communities can do to move forward under these three goals.

ELIMINATE PROBLEMATIC PLASTICS

Now that preemption of local government regulation has been repealed, Colorado towns and municipalities have more opportunities to regulate plastic waste and reduce their costs to manage it.

- **Implement a by-request-only policy on utensils, straws, napkins, and condiment packets for takeout and delivery.** Since the increase in takeout and delivery orders during the pandemic, it is estimated that plastic waste has risen 250-300%. In May of this year, the Denver City Council passed the state's first by-request-only ordinance requiring restaurants and third-party delivery platforms to only provide single-use items including straws, utensils, napkins, and condiment packets when requested by the customer. This will reduce waste and will also save restaurants money. Learn more at Skip the Stuff campaign.
- **Help restaurants make the transition to more sustainable take-out containers.** The cities of Boulder and Golden have offered rebates to help restaurants move away from environmentally harmful materials like polystyrene or styrofoam take-out containers to recyclable or compostable containers. Boulder provides a subsidy of up to $1,000 (out of $83,000 total) for each restaurant in the city to purchase recyclable and compostable containers and utensils from a city-approved list at a local supplier. The subsidy has helped 83 restaurants and is paid for from the city's trash tax revenue. The city also partners with Boulder County to provide zero waste advisors who work with restaurants to explore alternative container options. The City of Golden offers a rebate to restaurants for the purchase of compostable take-out containers of $250 with proof of purchase. The rebate covers $0.08 per compostable unit over polystyrene containers. For funding for such programs, municipalities can utilize the revenues from the paper and plastic bag fee that will go into effect in 2023 as part of the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act.

INNOVATE NEW REUSABLE AND REFILLABLE PACKAGING MODELS

It would be a mistake to simply replace single-use plastics with other single-use products, even if they are recyclable or compostable. The greatest benefits to our climate, our health, and our environment come when we use reusable packaging and food serviceware, such as stainless steel utensils, ceramic plates, and drinking glasses. Studies have shown that reusables, when used again and again, have the greatest environmental, health, and social benefits. Cities, towns, and counties have several opportunities to support the growing market of reusable and refillable packaging:

- **Require reusable food serviceware for on-site dining.** Nearly a dozen U.S. cities require restaurants to serve dine-in customers on reusable food serviceware instead of disposables. Berkeley, Calif. and Belingham, Wash. are great models of how to phase in this policy over time as part of a comprehensive city approach to reduce single-use plastics.
- **Support new business models that provide reusable packaging.** There is a burgeoning movement of new and expanding businesses to provide reusable alternatives for everything from food serviceware to take-out containers to mailing envelopes and more. Cities, towns, and counties can help grow these new models by giving preference to reuse/refill services in purchasing policies or request for proposals (RFPs), or requiring public events to use reusable food serviceware. The City of Boulder is currently launching a city supported reusable take-out container program for restaurants, using city funds and a Boulder County Sustainability Matching Grant (for a total of $100,000). Learn more about the inspiring new business models around reusable packaging at Upstream.

BUILD A MORE ROBUST, FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING SYSTEM

Colorado is one of the worst states at recycling. Our recycling rate is a dismal 16%, only half the national average of 32%. A strong recycling system can also help to reduce the health and environmental impacts of plastics.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a policy model used around the world for decades, is gaining momentum in the U.S. as the best policy tool to sustainably finance and expand recycling programs. It would require consumer goods companies to fund recycling programs, rather than local governments or ratepayers. This can create a stable funding mechanism to ensure that every Coloradan has convenient, easy access to recycling for common materials such as plastic bottles, aluminum cans, glass bottles, cardboard, and printed paper. This could benefit Colorado's cities and towns by:

- Reducing current government and ratepayer costs to run recycling program.
- Developing a cost-effective, consistent statewide recycling.
- Expanding convenient, access to recycling statewide, for all Coloradans including in underserved areas, particularly multi-family buildings and rural areas.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions to help meet local and state climate goals.

While many of these policy tools directly reduce plastic waste and pollution, they also directly impact our goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create green jobs, and bolster stronger, more resilient local economies. We hope local communities see the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act as a strong foundation to build upon and continue to move forward with proven local and state policy solutions to further reduce plastics, improve recycling programs, and support new reusable packaging services.

Increase recycling, reduce government costs, and reduce climate pollution

HOW COLORADO CITIES AND TOWNS WILL BENEFIT FROM AN EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY (EPR) POLICY FOR PACKAGING

By Kate Bailey and Rachel Setzke, Eco-Cycle

Colorado's recycling rate is a dismal 16%, less than half the national average and well below our state goal of 28% by 2021. By recycling more, Colorado can reduce climate pollution, protect our clean air and water, and create jobs.

But our current method of funding the recycling system is disjointed and unsustainable. Residents frequently say they want better recycling, but most municipalities lack the financial resources, staffing, or technical knowledge to increase or provide services. Further, local governments don't have any influence over how products are made or if they are recyclable, reusable, or compostable. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a policy model used worldwide for decades, is gaining momentum in the U.S. as **the best policy tool to sustainably finance and expand recycling programs to increase recycling rates and reduce climate pollution.** EPR legislation is likely to be introduced in Colorado in 2022.

WHAT WILL AN EPR PROGRAM FOR PACKAGING LOOK LIKE IN COLORADO?

A statewide EPR policy for packaging and paper products would require producers to cover the full costs to collect, transport, and process recyclables such as cardboard, paper, and aluminum, glass, and plastic containers. The producers would form an organization and submit a plan to the state on how to fund, manage, and improve recycling statewide. The EPR legislation would outline what needs to be included in the plan, such as recycling goals, education standards, investments in recycling infrastructure, and stakeholder engagement.

Over 40 countries have mandatory EPR policies for packaging, and Maine and Oregon adopted the first U.S. policies this summer, with 10 other states also pursuing policies. Colorado's EPR program for paint has substantially increased paint recycling by providing recycling access to 95% of Coloradans, and saved municipalities tens of thousands of dollars per year since implementation in 2015.

EPR CAN REDUCE COSTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES & COUNTIES

Many Colorado communities spend tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to operate or support local recycling programs, such as running drop-off centers or subsidizing the costs of residential recycling collection. These costs have escalated over the past several years, forcing many communities to raise rates or cut or even cancel programs. **Under an EPR policy for packaging, it is the producers, not local governments, who are responsible for funding the collection, transportation, and processing of recyclable materials.** This means an EPR program will reduce or even eliminate the costs of running local recycling programs for packaging materials, providing substantial cost savings while maintaining or increasing existing services.

EPR CAN BE CUSTOMIZED TO FIT COLORADO'S NEEDS

Recycling in Colorado is managed primarily at the local level and there are different approaches to how cities and towns engage in recycling. **A well-designed EPR policy would develop a comprehensive, systemic approach to improving recycling statewide while preserving local municipal choices and balancing regional needs.** It would ensure that jurisdictions that provide services or manage recycling contracts have the option to continue to do so, but it would not impose recycling requirements upon local governments. The following chart shows how an EPR system can fund recycling based on how municipalities currently manage programs.

HOW AN EPR PROGRAM COULD FUND RECYCLING IN DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

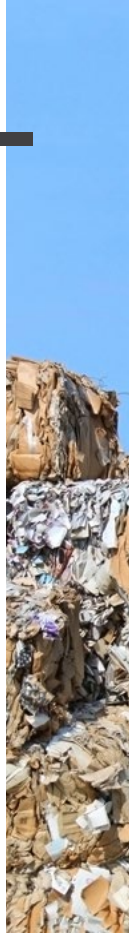
Program type	Examples	How EPR could fund recycling*
Municipally provided collection	Denver, Longmont	Municipalities are reimbursed for costs to provide recycling services for covered materials
Municipal contract	Golden, Carbondale	Municipalities continue to manage local contracts; the costs of recycling are paid for by the producer organization
Municipal or county funded drop-off center	Greeley, Summit County	Communities are reimbursed for costs to collect, transport, and sort covered recyclable materials
No municipal involvement	Lakewood, Colorado Springs	Producers pay for recycling collection from households by contracting with private sector companies

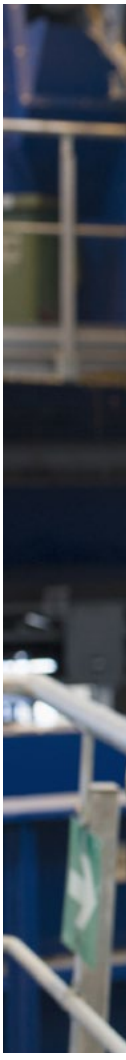
** Under any of these arrangements, governments could opt out of providing existing services and the producer organization would then contract with private service providers.*

EPR CAN CREATE A MORE CONVENIENT, EQUITABLE RECYCLING SYSTEM, ENSURING ACCESS THROUGHOUT THE STATE

Recycling collection needs to be as convenient as trash service for everyone–urban or rural, single-family home or multi-family. Unfortunately, in much of Colorado, most single-family residents must subscribe to and pay more to have curbside recycling services. Worse yet, nearly 60% of multi-family households have no onsite access to recycling, and in rural and mountain areas, recycling is often significantly more expensive, which makes it more challenging to financially sustain these programs. Because of these factors, recycling in Colorado is currently inconvenient, inaccessible, and highly inequitable for many residents. An EPR policy can provide dedicated ongoing funding to support convenient and equitable recycling systems across Colorado.

Eco-Cycle, based in Boulder, is one of the oldest and largest non-profit recycling organizations in the world and has 45 years of hands-on experience creating and operating recycling programs.





OVER 150 GLOBAL COMPANIES AND LEADING ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORT EPR AS THE ONLY PROVEN AND EFFECTIVE TOOL TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT, ONGOING, AND DEDICATED FUNDING TO INCREASE RECYCLING, REDUCE PLASTIC POLLUTION, AND MOVE TOWARD A CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

Just Transition means

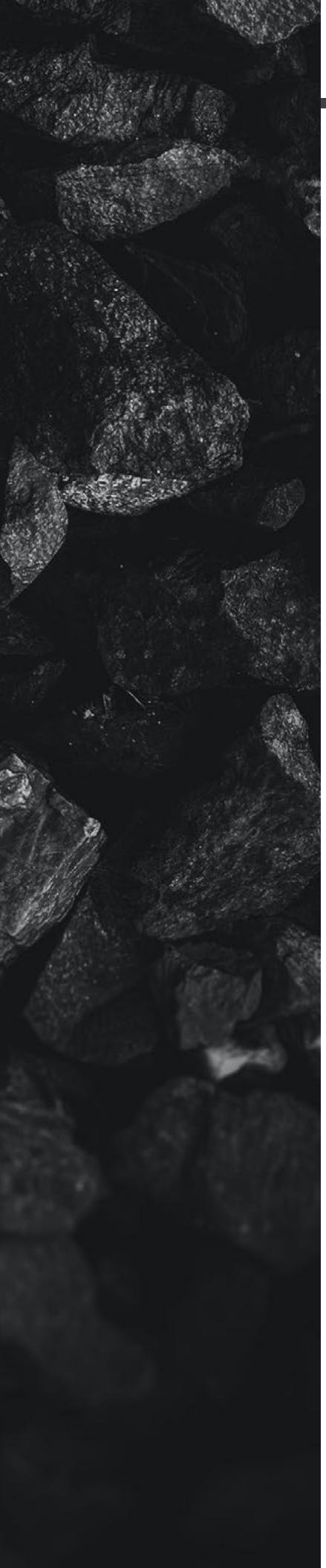
HELP IS NEEDED FOR COLORADO'S GREAT NORTHWEST

By Ray Beck, Club 20 membership chair, former Craig mayor, and former Moffat County commissioner

In Northwest Colorado, the coal industry has sustained the quality way of life going back to the late 1970s with a power plant and coal mines affording good, high paying jobs (over $90,000 a year salary average), and over 700 full-time employees.

The top 10 Moffat County taxpayers are all geared toward energy in one form or the other. Tri-State Generation and Transmission is the second largest coal-fired power plant in Colorado, producing 1,283 megawatts of power. The county's ten top taxpayers are equal to 46% of the assessed property valuations and 45% of the county's revenue.

Moffat County is also known for agriculture and many opportunities for public land-based recreation, such as trails for hiking, biking, ATVs, and snowmobiles. The mighty Yampa River offers many recreational opportunities for those who like to float one of the last free flowing rivers in the Western United States as well as Class A fishing on the Yampa, White, Little Snake, and Green River. It is the second largest county in terms of land mass in the state with 40% private lands and 60% federal lands, which equals 4,743 square miles. Craig is the county seat with a current population of 9,060, and the overall population of the county is 13,292. Craig is the 55th largest city in Colorado, manages over 120 acres of parks and open space, and is the home of Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) that also has a campus in Rangely.



Like anywhere, Craig and Moffat County are always looking for opportunities to bring in more business and industry. There is much to offer, and the region is capitalizing on additional assets beyond the fossil fuel-driven economy. Current assets such as the Yampa River, outdoor recreation, and tourism are economies in their infancy in Colorado's great northwest. The city and county are working together on two regional solar projects and a water park along the Yampa River. They have worked in partnership to build out and upgraded the boat ramp and river access in Loudy Simpson Park consisting of 450 acres along the Yampa River. The park's electric infrastructure has been upgraded and replaced for current and future outdoor opportunities and signature events.

People in Moffat County know they have a future, but they are not exactly sure what that future looks like. The power plant and coal mines will be shutting down over the course of the next nine years or less. The fate of the coal industry in Moffat and Routt County is seen by many to be in the hands of the Colorado General Assembly, which has defined what our energy portfolio will look like by the year 2040. They know they are bound by state mandates, but they are also not sitting around waiting for someone else to solve their problems.

Recently, the state created the Office of Just Transition, following the passage of HB19-1314 in 2019. The State Transition Advisory Council drafted a plan that, once implemented, will aid local employees in the transition from the coal industry and provide financial aid for the benefit of boosting our local economy and opportunities for economic development. Moffat County is looking for a hand-up that will aid in the building out and maintenance of our infrastructure. The plans by local leaders that have been developed, or are currently being developed, and will require financial help to be fully implemented and see projects to completion.

Moffat County is joined by at least 12 other coal-impacted communities that will be affected from the shutdown of fossil fuels and may need a hand-up for their economic recovery. Recent legislation signed by Gov. Jared Polis will direct $15 million to the Office of Just Transition, which is the only funding the office has received to date. While that is certainly a step in the right direction, it is a fraction of what will be needed from the state to mitigate the impact on coal-impacted counties and municipalities. Recent discussions between state legislators and some of Colorado's congressional delegation have been centered on how to spend the remaining $1.8 billion of the $3.8 billion the state received as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Many in Northwest Colorado have been disappointed that there appears to have been no discussion of economic recovery for the coal-impacted communities.

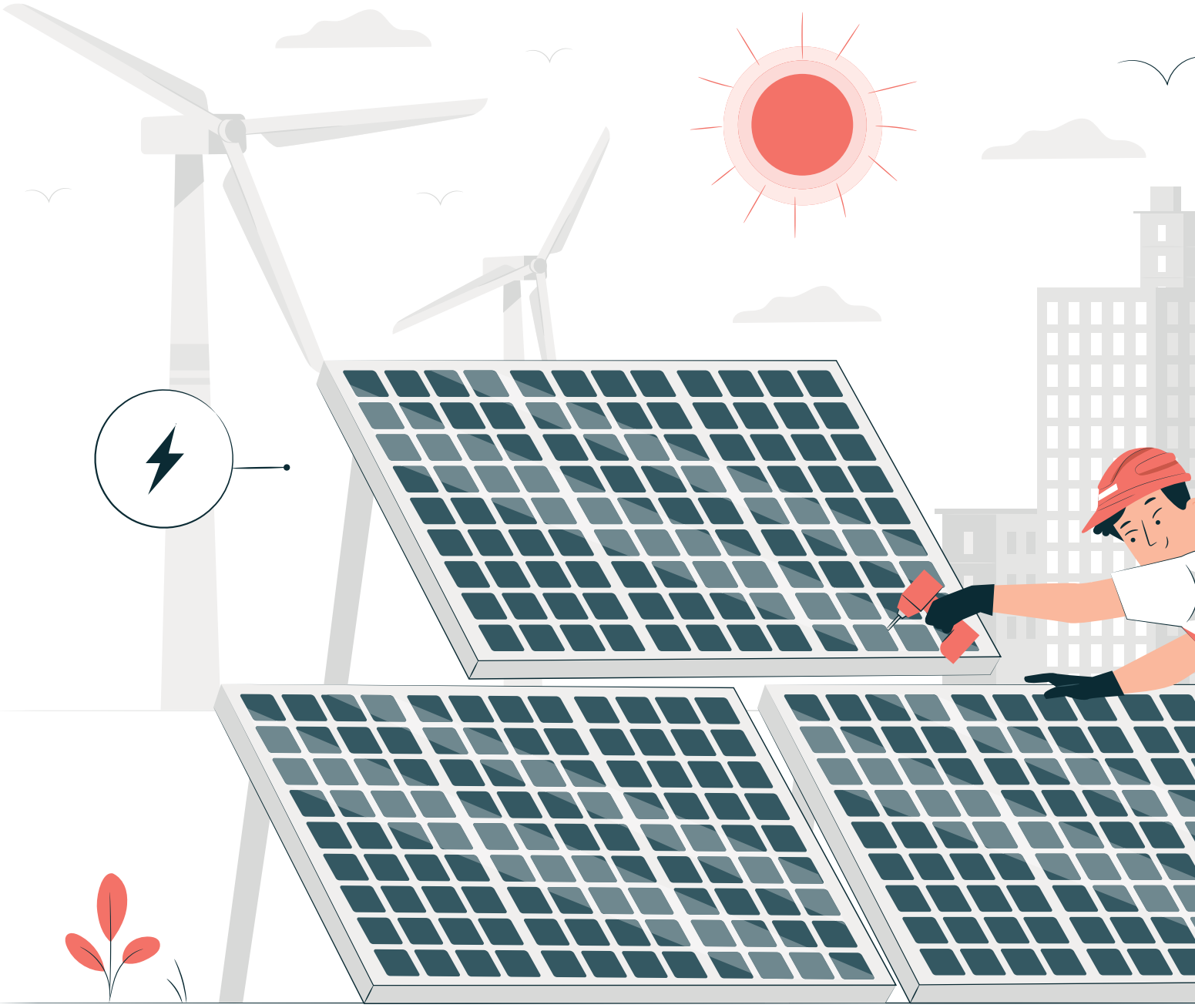
From the perspective of most in Northwest Colorado, state lawmakers looking to eliminate primary industries and employees across the state should consider an objective process to review and assess proposed legislation, the local and state costs to implement such legislation, and the impacts and effects that such legislation may have on rural communities. Retooling an economy can often take decades, but Moffat County and Craig do not have decades to develop and implement an economic plan that will care for our funding initiatives, bond obligations, infrastructure improvements, and massive overhaul of our economy and revenue streams.

The hearty souls that call Northwest Colorado home do have great optimism, tenacity, and creativity in considering what our economic future will look like. However, it won't happen without help.

Solar projects heat up in NORTHWEST COLORADO

By Mike Lane, City of Steamboat Springs communications manager

In March 2020, the Northwest (NW) Colorado Region–consisting of eight local governments throughout Routt and Moffat Counties–contracted with McKinstry, a national construction and energy services firm, to perform a feasibility study for solar and resiliency opportunities across 15 different sites throughout the region.



The goal of the feasibility study was to investigate ways to deploy ground and roof-mounted solar arrays, and determine the potential of the solar and resiliency improvements to accomplish the following goals:

- Reduce energy and utility costs
- Improve energy reliability
- Increase resiliency across sites
- Offset grid energy usage at each site
- Progress renewable energy goals of the state

Once the feasibility study was complete, a series of arrays and resiliency solutions were engineered which were designed to meet the entities' priorities and assembled into a project that would be constructed through an Energy Savings Performance Contract (EPC) approach with each regional partner.

"We're excited to partner with the NW Colorado Regional Partners to identify their energy needs and opportunities, leveraging available financing mechanisms like the Energy Performance Contracting program to create financially responsible opportunities to help reach their sustainability goals," said Ashley Brasovan, McKinstry energy account executive.

In January 2021, the NW Colorado Regional Partners were awarded $2.1 million in grants from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Energy Impact Fund to support the region's use of renewable energy for both direct-owned solar at 13 different sites. Additional funds were awarded for a regional solar garden to benefit both local governments and the community.

"This is an enormous grant for Northwest Colorado and shows the commitment from a number of organizations to be fiscally efficient and also in moving toward renewable energy in support of Colorado's goal of being 100% renewable energy by 2040," said Winnie DelliQuadri, special projects/ intergovernmental services manager for the City of Steamboat Springs.

This project will see the installation of solar arrays at 13 local government facilities in the cities and towns of Craig, Steamboat Springs, Hayden, Oak Creek, and Yampa, as well as with Moffat County School District, the Yampa Valley Regional Airport and Moffat, and Routt Counties. The grant fund will be used to buy down the payback period for each partner to an 11-year finance period.

"Our state is moving toward a clean energy economy, and that has some economic impacts on our region," continued DelliQuadri. "It's a way for government to move toward clean energy as we've been mandated to do and, at the same time, make government operations more efficient by lowering our utility costs."

Individual projects range from $63,500 to nearly $900,000 and involve DC and AC electrical work, minor boring for ground mount foundations, trenching for AC conduit, and minor site grading. Permanent fences will be installed when necessary. McKinstry began the construction process this spring and the projects are anticipated to be complete within 12 months.

The Department of Local Affairs' (DOLA) Renewable Energy grant program was created to assist political subdivisions that are socially and/or economically impacted by the development, processing, or energy conversion of minerals and mineral fuels, and to help transition local governments across Colorado to a clean energy economy.

With the power of information,

BENCHMARKING POLICIES SUPPORT EQUITY

By Kirk Longstein, Fort Collins Utilities policy and project manager

Fort Collins Utilities began its public involvement process to explore benchmarking policies in 2017, knowing that nearly 2,500 existing commercial (non-industrial) buildings account for over 50% of our community's energy use and resulting carbon emissions.

In 2018, Fort Collins joined the growing number of U.S cities who have adopted energy benchmarking and transparency policies with its adoption of a Building Energy and Water Scoring Ordinance. With the program's implementation, Fort Collins businesses have access to new information in the local real estate market, driving benefits both for the environment and the bottom line. By using the ENERGY STAR® Portfolio Manager tool to measure a building's energy performance and verify savings, building occupants and facility managers can more precisely gauge the effectiveness of their actions and determine which efficiency upgrades will provide the most benefit.

Within the real estate community, utility costs are not often a consideration when buying or renting a space. By having this information available to businesses, a knowledge-based approach is provided for making decisions. With a split incentive between tenant and building owner to make energy upgrades, this program can bring both sides together by offering a view of the joint benefits in terms of real dollar savings. The Fort Collins Building Energy and Water Scoring Ordinance inserts data into the decision-making process and aids long term vision and planning.

In addition to driving energy and carbon savings, the intent of the Fort Collins Building Energy and Water Scoring program is to provide additional information during upfront lease negotiations so that a business with a tight operating budget can benefit from a lower operating cost option. According to the Federal Reserve, a relatively large share of minority-owned firms face potentially large unmet financing needs, and Black-owned firms are less likely than white-owned firms to be approved for financing. With capital constraints making it harder for a business to get started, a minority-owned small business may also be disproportionately impacted by high utility bills if the business occupies an outdated building with poor efficiency. Money saved through energy efficiency can directly impact a business' bottom line and enable them to be more competitive in today's market.

The city's benchmarking ordinance has not overlooked the opportunity to advance equity goals highlighted by the Fort Collins Our Climate Future plan. The issues that benchmarking, data transparency, and other building policies aim to address (like energy use and inefficiency) disproportionately burden communities of color and low-income communities. Fort Collins takes seriously its role to utilize benchmarking as a foundation for addressing disparities as it pursues additional building related policies and programs.

Colorado's municipal electric utilities lead the

WAY IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY PROGRAMS

By Dan Hodges, Colorado Association of Municipal Utilities executive director

Colorado has 28 municipal electric systems that serve approximately 17% of the state's population. Municipal utilities in Colorado include major metropolitan centers like Colorado Springs, small agricultural communities like Center and Holly, world class resort towns like Aspen and Glenwood Springs, and bedroom suburban communities like Fountain.

While there are tremendous geographic, economic, and cultural differences between these communities, each is united by after the fact their citizens have a direct say in how their utility is run.

The community ownership model is why municipal electric utilities are also collectively referred to as "public power," and why it comes as no surprise that Colorado's municipal electric utilities have long been leaders in advancing sustainable energy programs across the state.

Some of the first wind turbines installed in Colorado were in the public power communities of Springfield and Wray. In 2011, Colorado Springs was the first community in Colorado to develop a community solar garden. In 2014, Platte River Power Authority joined forces with its member cities of Estes Park, Fort Collins, Longmont, and Loveland to establish "Efficiency Works," a first-of-its-kind program which established common efficiency programs and offerings across the four cities (achieving an energy savings equivalent to the average energy use of 11,500 homes). In 2015, Aspen was the first community in Colorado to achieve a 100% Renewable Energy electric portfolio, and they were joined in 2019 by Glenwood Springs. And last year, both Colorado Springs Utilities and Platte River Power Authority announced that they would be retiring all of their coal-fired electric generating units within the next eight years and seeking to bring on hundreds of megawatts of replacement renewable energy.

More recently, the cities of Glenwood Springs and Aspen announced in May a collaboration between the two communities to increase the number of charging stations needed in their region to support the growth of light and heavy-duty electric vehicles. Already these two municipal utility communities are leading the way in this arena, as there are currently eight electric buses operating within Aspen and in the 70-mile stretch between Aspen and Glenwood Springs as part of the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority's (RFTA) Battery Electric Bus (BEB) Pilot Project.

The sustainability efforts of Colorado's municipal utilities have not only been precedent setting within the state, they have gained national recognition as well. The American Public Power Association in Washington, D.C. recently created the Smart Energy Provider (SEP) program as a nationwide, best practices designation for utilities that go above and beyond in creating forward-thinking and customer-focused sustainability programs. Utilities must apply for the designation, and a national expert review panel evaluates applications to ensure utilities meet criteria. Currently, 94 municipal utilities across the country have attained the designation, including the Colorado cities of Fort Collins, Longmont, and Loveland.

At the very heart of this longstanding commitment to sustainability is the municipal utility business model. Municipal utilities are not in the business of making a profit by selling electricity to consumers. Rather, they are in the public service business. Each municipal utility in Colorado provides electricity to their communities at not-for-profit rates and in a manner that reflects community values, based on direct input from the very members of the community they serve.

As Coloradans lead the way in both reducing the amount of energy they use and ensuring the energy they do consume comes from responsible sources, it is only natural for their municipal electric utilities to continue to help facilitate these efforts.

Reuse increases

WATER SUSTAINABILITY

By Greg Baker, Aurora Water public relations manager

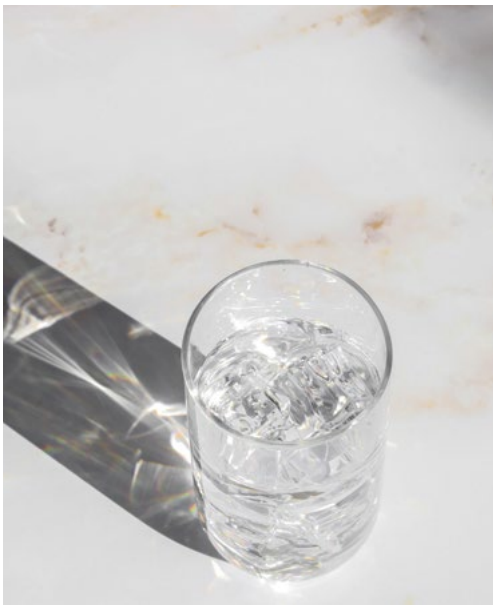
Growth and water. These two words can trigger a long debate on sustainability in arid Colorado. With proper planning and innovation, communities can continue to meet current water needs and allow for increases in population.

Aurora Water, for example, is addressing concerns regarding aridification, the principle that the west is growing hotter and dryer, while projecting a doubling in population over the next 40 years. This requires a holistic review of the city's water resources to help develop a pragmatic plan to best utilize this limited resource. Through a combination of aggressive conservation programs, active acquisition, new and innovative storage solutions, and an expanding implementation of reuse, Aurora Water is creating a substantial, yet sustainable water future.

Under Colorado's stringent water law, owners of water rights receive decrees that specify the availability and usability of that water. Aurora's water begins as mountain snowmelt and is conveyed to the city through a complex system of tunnels and pipelines, with some water traveling up to 180 miles to reach the city. Full use of these rights becomes paramount due to the high cost of this system. Since 95% of Aurora's water rights are fully reusable, after the extreme drought of 2002-03 strained the system, it was a natural move to recapture and reuse this water. While Aurora has been reclaiming water for irrigation of municipal parks and golf courses since the 1960s, these "purple pipe" options are limited due to their dedicated treatment and distribution systems. A larger and more efficient potable reuse system was needed to not only drought-harden the city, but to also provide additional water to meet future growth.

In 2007, the Prairie Waters system broke ground and would soon become the first and largest potable reuse system in Colorado. The concept was simple. Water, once used, returns to the South Platte River, either as fully cleansed water from Metro Water Recovery's two facilities or through natural infiltration from irrigation. Aurora Water still owns this water and has the right to use it over and over again until extinction. Prairie Waters recaptures this water through a series of alluvial well fields in Weld County, which provides a natural treatment process as the water passes through sand and gravel before it is piped to the state-of-the-art Binney Water Purification Facility just north of Aurora Reservoir. After it has been further purified and blended with Aurora's mountain water, this high quality product not only meets all state and federal drinking water standards, but it also meets our customers' expectations for award winning taste.

When it came online in 2010, Prairie Waters was initially capable of providing an additional ten million gallons per day to supplement a system-wide water need of about 46 million gallons per day on an annualized average. Aurora Water's Integrated Water Master Plan, completed in 2017, has identified long-term system expansions to meet growth needs including additional capacity to Prairie Waters. Many of these expansions are already occurring, helping Aurora meet the future needs of a growing community.



The most sustainable water supply for CASTLE ROCK

By Sandi Aguilar, Castle Rock Water customer relations program manager

What is the most sustainable water supply? The one we already have. Reuse water is recycling the water that has been used in our homes, purifying it, and using it over and over again.

Taking a proactive approach to the Town of Castle Rock's water concerns is the most efficient way to protect the community's water future. Not being near a local water supply, Castle Rock, like many south metro communities, relied solely on groundwater sources. With groundwater levels in the region declining an average 30 feet per year in the 1990s, procuring renewable water that is replenished each year by rain and snow was the plan. The town's goal is to utilize at least 75% renewable water by 2050 and with the recent addition of reuse water, that goal is assured. And today, the average drop in water in the groundwater aquifer is only 5 feet per year.

Reuse water may be Castle Rock's most cost-effective, environmentally sound and safe water supply. Reuse water is economical because there is no need to purchase new water, nor pump it from great distances. By not mining water from deep underground and pulling excessive amounts from the creek, there are minimal disruptions to the ecosystem. Since this water is already available, reuse water is also a sustainable supply regardless of growth or drought. Most importantly, various treatment processes can easily eradicate biological, environmental, and pharmaceutical contaminants, making it safe to drink.

Reuse water involves producing safe drinking water from wastewater. Once water has been used in Castle Rock homes and businesses, it flows to the water reclamation facility, where it is treated to environmental standards and then released into East Plum Creek. The town has rights to this water and instead of letting this water flow downstream for use by other communities, Castle Rock recaptures it from Plum Creek in Sedalia. This water is transported to the Plum Creek Water Purification Facility, where it goes through a multitude of treatment processes to meet or surpass drinking water purity standards.

To ensure the water is safe, Castle Rock Water worked with local, state, and national water industry experts on identifying the technological processes and compliance measures for reuse. Castle Rock Water performed design and laboratory studies and conducted a pilot project in 2018. The processes identified as working the best with the existing processes and conditions unique to the community included Biologically Active Carbon Filtration, Granular Activated Carbon, Ozone Advanced Oxidation, and UV Disinfection. Added to sedimentation and microfiltration, these treatments provide redundancies and address additional possible constituents, making for a purer drinking water.

Reuse water will constitute about one-third of the community's water supply, potentially saving 1.2 billion gallons per year in the near future. While reuse water will diminish the need for other water sources, it is not the only sustainable effort being put forth by Castle Rock Water. The water provider has implemented conservation efforts with the goal to reach 100 gallons per person daily (gpcd) by 2050, from the current 117 gpcd. Importing water, some from Aurora's Prairie Waters (a reuse supply), and increasing storage opportunities in Rueter-Hess and Chatfield Reservoirs are additional measures. Additionally, plans to supplement groundwater supplies with Aquifer Storage and Recovery will ensure this supply continues to be available for high demand and drought situations. Together, these efforts are making a strong and sustainable water future for Castle Rock.

Castle Rock's recently constructed Plum Creek Diversion and Pump Station delivers renewable water supplies, including reuse water, local Plum Creek surface water and in the future, stored water in Chatfield and other nearby reservoirs, back to Castle Rock to be treated for drinking water.

Green from the ground up:

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABILITY AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL

By Kayla Betzold, Wheat Ridge sustainability coordinator; with contributions from Jonathan Wachtel, Sustainable Neighborhood Network

More than a decade ago, the City of Lakewood's Planning Department noticed an emerging trend: Residents and stakeholders engaging in the development of neighborhood plans, light rail station area plans, and corridor plans were increasingly vocal about the importance of sustainability-related topics, urging the city to include sustainability and climate action in planning processes and city programming.

As the concepts and benefits of sustainability gained traction with residents, so did the demand for the city to provide programs, policies, and resources to implement this community vision for a more sustainable future. In response, staff developed the Sustainable Neighborhoods Program concept as a mechanism to leverage the passion and expertise of residents as volunteers.

The Sustainable Neighborhoods Program provides support to neighborhoods to advance neighborhood-level climate action and empower residents to create sustainable and resilient communities. This unique, first of its kind program uses a three-step launch process to help each neighborhood: 1) identify areas of interest, 2) determine existing resources and expertise, and 3) organize teams around each identified project. This planning process serves to catalyze the neighborhood, distribute the workload, and train teams of volunteer leaders. The Sustainable Neighborhoods Program relies on the expertise of residents, as they are directly identifying neighborhood challenges, educating their neighbors, and implementing projects. The program builds off sustainability goals from the Lakewood Sustainability Plan related to energy, air, water, land, and people, and the fluidity of the program is the hallmark of its success.

This program can be illustrated through a specific example from Lakewood's largest neighborhood, Green Mountain. Through the program, the neighborhood's leadership team chose to focus on recycling education in area schools. Volunteers from the neighborhood provided six local schools with waste audits and engaged over 1,000 students in recycling education programs. As is often the case with neighborhood-led projects, outcomes extended beyond those intended. Volunteers noticed a large volume of full milk cartons being thrown out every day. They contacted the Action Center, a non-profit that provides basic needs to Lakewood residents, who now accepts unopened milk cartons from the schools, delivered each week by neighborhood volunteers. In one lunchroom during a semester, 1,000 milk cartons were sent to homes in need. This was just one of 46 projects in the neighborhood in one year.

Following successful implementation, Lakewood received numerous inquiries from other municipalities interested in adopting the program. The Sustainable Neighborhood Network has since transitioned to become a nonprofit in 2020 to support onboarding, training, and ongoing assistance to member cities administering the program. Members include the cities of Lakewood, Denver, Fort Collins, and Wheat Ridge on Colorado's front range.

Since its inception, the program has supported more than 1,100 projects and engaged over 38,000 participants in more than 30 neighborhoods. Project examples include: Solar United Neighbors co-operatives, Bee Safe neighborhoods, tree planting initiatives, and neighborhood energy efficiency reduction targets.

WHEAT RIDGE HIGHLIGHT

Sustainability got its "official" start in Wheat Ridge in 2018, when the then-mayor appointed an 11-person Environmental Sustainability Committee tasked with providing recommendations to council in each of the six highlighted topic areas: energy efficiency & green building, renewable energy, transportation, solid waste & recycling, water, and communications & engagement (which happen to line up nicely with the five topic areas of sustainable neighborhoods).

The program was a good fit for Wheat Ridge, as we were looking for ways to empower residents to engage with sustainability practices and strengthen neighborhood identity in Wheat Ridge with limited staff capacity.

I rolled out the program in 2020, which was challenging given the uncertainty of the pandemic, but ultimately successful. It felt great to be part of a program with a network of cities. I met the program coordinators from the other cities and was able to rely on them when I was learning and designing the program in Wheat Ridge.

The website allowed me to look at what neighbors in the other cities were accomplishing to give me an idea of successful projects. The application was open in summer 2020 with a virtual open house event in July. I onboarded the first two neighborhoods in fall 2020.

The first two neighborhoods in the program are Applewood Villages, comprised of about 1,100 residents, and Paramount Heights, comprised of about 650 residents. The neighborhood leaders were excited to have been accepted into the program and quickly began to form a neighborhood leadership team and started making progress towards event and project planning. The first few months of the program were all about the neighborhoods setting themselves up for success. We developed email accounts and social media pages and the neighborhoods created communication plans. The leadership teams developed interest surveys, both online and mailed, to find out what types of projects their neighbors were most interested in accomplishing. Then, the leadership teams used that information to develop and lead some great projects in our city.

Since last fall, we've hosted 33 events, workshops, and clubs in support of a variety of sustainability topics from composting workshops to leaf drop off events to zero waste food trucks that support local businesses during the pandemic. Neighbors have organized seed sharing workshops, led a Yoga in the Park event, and most recently we hosted a citywide paint recycling event with over 300 cars through the drive-thru line. The event diverted over 36,000 pounds of paint from the landfill!

This program is changing the way the city works with residents. Our two neighborhoods are close geographically, but differ in demographics and project interests. This is the value of this program: understanding that each neighborhood is different, and they can decide for themselves what they want to accomplish. The neighbors lead and manage the projects – I provide them with the support they need to get it done. We've started to address larger topics in our community, such as income inequality and food insecurity, by focusing on the people category of the program and building donation and food drives into our sustainability events. We hosted an electronics and battery recycling event this spring in conjunction with SustainAbility, an organization that provides recycling and composting services and employment opportunities to those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, bringing together the 3 pillars of sustainability – social, economic, and environmental. This event recycled over 2,600 pounds of electronic waste and over 200 pounds of batteries and collected over $2,500 worth of donated clothes, toys, and supplies along with hats, gloves, and blankets for those experiencing homelessness in our community.

This program is beneficial to our city, as it creates a framework for neighbors to develop an action plan to enhance the long-term character, livability, and sustainability of their unique neighborhood, leading to an overall increase in neighborhood connections and resiliency within our city. The Sustainable Neighborhoods program is resident-led, which differentiates it from other city programs. By implementing a program with this framework, we are allowing our residents to lead one another, not only within the Sustainable Neighborhoods program, but in making positive change within our city.

If you're looking for a way to engage residents in sustainability projects in their own backyards (and streets and parks and neighborhood!), learn more about the Sustainable Neighborhood Network at *sustainableneighborhoodnetwork.org*.

Sustainable Neighborhood Network

Meeting sustainability goals will require smarter cities

WITHOUT NEW TECHNOLOGY, PARTNERSHIP, AND INNOVATION, CITIES WILL MISS THE MARK

By Tyler Svitak, Colorado Smart Cities Alliance executive director

Smart cities use new technology, data, and partnership as tools to approach complex problems, and few issues are more complicated than achieving truly sustainable communities. The environmental and social consequences of the status quo are pressuring municipalities across the country, and especially in Colorado, to reckon with new ways to approach water, energy, transportation, and housing. The issues become even more pressing as the social aspects of sustainability elevate issues of equity, where historically disadvantaged communities continue to feel the worst consequences of our environmental damage.

Many municipalities, counties, and states have established audacious but necessary sustainability goals in response to growing threats to quality of life. To implement the massive change and innovation required to hit these goals, cities and towns will need strong governance, funding, internal capacity, data, stakeholder participation, and partnership mechanisms. These are among what the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance considers the Elements of Smart Government, and the governments that want to tackle sustainability can benefit from robust smart cities programs to help them achieve their goals.

COLORADO CASE STUDIES

Let's take a closer look at some real examples. Many governments are seeking to generate 100% renewable energy and then electrify everything they can in order to meet carbon emissions reduction goals. This is the right strategy, but implementing it is a challenge due to grid balancing, energy storage, load management, peak demand events, and more. Smart cities technologies can help overcome these challenges, and assist cities to implement renewable and electrification strategies well.

Image courtesy of the Boulder Daily Camera

VEHICLE-TO-GRID

One technology that can help to solve these problems is vehicle-to-grid (V2G), which allows electric vehicles (EVs) to discharge their very large batteries to power homes, buildings, or the entire energy grid. When strung together, a distributed network of EVs can provide more energy storage than a utility alone, which has the potential to provide massive resilience, climate, and energy cost benefits to communities. It is innovations like this that need to be proven to reach our aggressive climate goals, and smart cities in Colorado are tackling them head on.

The Colorado Smart Cities Alliance partnered with Fermata Energy, the Alliance Center, and the City of Boulder to test the nation's first commercially available fast-charging V2G solution. Initial results are promising, showing up to $300 in monthly building energy savings. This project won the IDC's Smart Buildings Award this year as an example of the innovation we need to reach our collective sustainability goals. The technology had never been used in Colorado, and the project required partnership with the charger and software manufacturer, the automaker, Xcel Energy, Colorado Carshare, the city, and the building owners. It also required creative funding models, data management processes, and other elements that a smart cities program can help cities navigate across departments and issues.

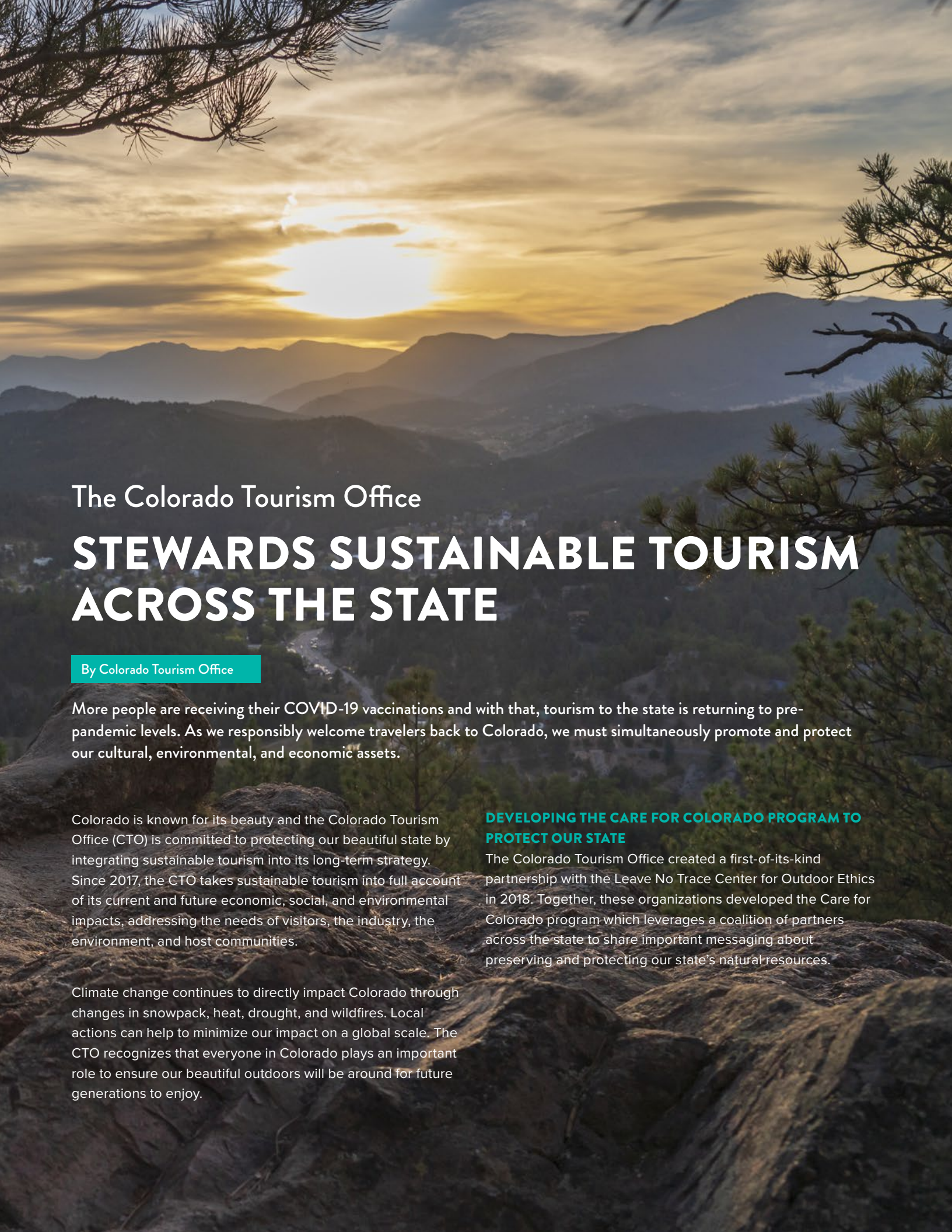
PUBLIC CHARGING

Furthermore, if we want people and fleets to electrify their own travels, we need convenient public charging options and solutions for people who live in multi-unit dwellings and can't charge at home. One project Denver recently implemented provides free public fast charging stations to transportation network company drivers that resulted in Lyft bringing 200 EVs to pilot a new program in Denver. This was a major smart cities project for the city and county that required many of the elements described above to accomplish an innovative technology project that aligned many partners around common goals.

LOOKING AHEAD

Colorado has recently launched the nation's largest fleet of electric, autonomous vehicles at the Colorado School of Mines. The project, called AvCo, is an exemplary demonstration of the impactful results that come from extensive collaboration between the private sector and multiple public agencies and stakeholders. The 100% electric shuttles will produce significant savings compared to a traditional gasoline or diesel transit service and the project paves the way for future efforts to reconceptualize our transportation systems to be more sustainable.

Smart cities need to be sustainable, and sustainable cities need to be smart. To save our communities from the impacts of climate change and other sustainability issues, governments must invest in structure, process, and resources to effectively innovate. A smart cities program can help foster the growth of innovation ecosystems through partnership with companies and academia to help solve those problems while seeding economic development opportunities. Any municipality with strong sustainability goals needs a robust smart cities program, too, because without one, they will struggle to accomplish what they've promised.



The Colorado Tourism Office

STEWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACROSS THE STATE

By Colorado Tourism Office

More people are receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations and with that, tourism to the state is returning to pre-pandemic levels. As we responsibly welcome travelers back to Colorado, we must simultaneously promote and protect our cultural, environmental, and economic assets.

Colorado is known for its beauty and the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) is committed to protecting our beautiful state by integrating sustainable tourism into its long-term strategy. Since 2017, the CTO takes sustainable tourism into full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.

Climate change continues to directly impact Colorado through changes in snowpack, heat, drought, and wildfires. Local actions can help to minimize our impact on a global scale. The CTO recognizes that everyone in Colorado plays an important role to ensure our beautiful outdoors will be around for future generations to enjoy.

DEVELOPING THE CARE FOR COLORADO PROGRAM TO PROTECT OUR STATE

The Colorado Tourism Office created a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics in 2018. Together, these organizations developed the Care for Colorado program which leverages a coalition of partners across the state to share important messaging about preserving and protecting our state's natural resources.

The Care for Colorado program promotes seven principles for sustainability through carefully crafted messaging, graphics, and videos. The seven Care for Colorado principles are:

- Know before you go.
- Stick to trails.
- Leave it as you find it.
- Trash the trash.
- Be careful with fire.
- Keep wildlife wild.
- Share our parks & trails.

Visitors can learn how to Care for Colorado in The CTO's "Are You Colo-Ready?" brochures, a collection of animated videos and publications, in all 10 Colorado Welcome Centers and on the Care for Colorado microsite (*colorado.com/CareForColorado*). The seven Care for Colorado principles aim to inspire low-impact travel, from the care of Colorado trails and mindful interaction with wildlife to the use of refillable beverage containers. Visitors are also encouraged to "Do Colorado Right" and embrace the state's new interpretation of responsible tourism — showing care not only for destinations but for others, including the people who call Colorado home.

Care for Colorado coalition members have committed to developing an education strategy around these principles aimed at encouraging their guests to be good stewards of the places they visit in Colorado, whether cultural or historic sites or waterways, trails, parks, and open spaces.

The Care for Colorado program also creates monthly messaging for partners to share on their marketing channels about timely topics, such as water safety in the summer and avalanche risk in the winter. Interested communities can learn more about the Care for Colorado program, find messaging to share, and learn how to become a coalition member at *colorado.com/CareForColorado*.

OTHER COLORADO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EFFORTS

Other efforts by the Colorado Tourism Office include electric vehicle byways and Colo-Road Trips.

Colo-Road Trips are a searchable, online collection of hundreds of multi-day itineraries aimed at inspiring travel in less-visited destinations and seasons. These Colo-Road Trips are a great way for travelers to find their way to lesser-known, fun, and inspiring Colorado destinations. Search by your favorite activity, city or town, or time of the year. Each multi-day trip idea includes great places to stay and eat and fun things to do, along with a "Sustainability Activity" and "Insider Tips," giving visitors the down-low on traveling like a local.

The Colorado Scenic & Historic Byways microsite (*colorado.com/colorados-scenic-historic-byways)* provides videos, photos, maps, itineraries, and other inspiration for exploring Colorado's 26 spectacular byways, more than any other state in the U.S. The Colorado Tourism Office has been working closely with the Colorado Energy Office to prioritize construction of electric vehicle charging stations along the state's 26 Scenic and Historic Byways, which wind throughout Colorado. Six of the 26 byways are already available for electric-vehicle charging, with at least six more ready by late summer.

INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO YOUR COMMUNITY'S TOURISM STRATEGY

The CTO also supports the four pillars of sustainable tourism by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, developed in an effort to develop a common language about sustainability in tourism. These pillars guide communities and organizations to implementing a sustainable tourism strategy.

Pillar 1: Socio-Economic

Maximize social and economic benefits of the local community. Community leaders should ensure long-term benefits to residents through:

- transparency by publicizing long-term strategies and plans for tourism
- providing opportunity for community members to give input on tourism strategies and plans
- ensuring the availability of job and business opportunities to local residents at wages that match the current cost of living
- supporting local businesses by first using local products and services before looking outside of the community, region, and/or Colorado

Pillar 2: Culture

Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and culture. Cultural assets should be protected as well as enhanced in a way that benefits the local community and educates visitors by:

- displaying accurate educational signage and information
- promoting and taking pride in the history and culture in a respectful manner
- ensuring the protection of cultural heritage sites

Pillar 3: Environment

In Colorado's rural communities, the surrounding open space and wildlife is often the initial draw for tourism. For that reason, it is crucial to protect the environment and minimize impacts through management and sustainable behaviors, such as:

- ensuring building and properties are managed for energy efficiency, reduction of waste, low-impact landscaping and minimizing water usage
- providing opportunities for clients and guests to lessen their environmental impact and support local businesses and organizations
- creating tourism products that minimize impacts to the environment and wildlife while also creating educational and learning opportunities

Pillar 4: Management and Modeling

The key ingredient to a successful sustainability plan is effective management, which includes a plan to assess, implement, and monitor. Communities should:

- develop a multi-year strategy that considers the community, culture, and environment
- begin to monitor, report, and evaluate this strategy to ensure its effectiveness
- create strategic plans to manage tourism seasonality
- ensure facilities and sites are accessible to individuals with disabilities

Colorado communities and partners can access more information about sustainable tourism and how to implement strategies for success by taking the Colorado Tourism Office's free Sustainable Tourism course online at *ctocraft.thinkific.com*. The course identifies sustainable tourism best practices, assessment and implementation plans, how to market your sustainability efforts, and case studies.

Tourism is one of Colorado's largest employers and contributes more than $20 billion to Colorado's economy each year. As the state's lead destination marketing organization, we will continue to lead in supporting tourism while protecting the very things that make Colorado special.

A sampling of free tools for ENERGY, CLIMATE, AND SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

By Christine Brinker, Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) energy efficiency policy expert

Planning for energy, climate, and sustainability plans, incentives, and policy options is far easier with the right data and modeling in hand.

Fortunately, municipalities have a wealth of free, easy-to-use, and data-driven tools. Here are some of the more widely regarded tools:

State and Local Planning for Energy (SLOPE) platform from the National Renewable Energy Lab: Enables data-driven local energy planning and decision making by integrating dozens of sources of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation data. Learn, for instance, projected energy efficiency potential by sector and incentive level, top ten electricity and natural gas savings measures in single-family homes, renewable energy generation potential, projected leveled costs of renewables, vehicle fuel consumption, vehicle miles traveled, and more. Website: *maps.nrel.gov/slope*.

Climate Action for Urban Sustainability (CURB) tool from C40 Cities and the World Bank: A data-driven scenario planning and modeling tool to evaluate policy and technology choices in energy, buildings, transport, water, and waste. Website: *worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/brief/the-curb-tool-climate-action-for-urban-sustainability.*

Low-Income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) tool from the U.S. Department of Energy: Provides estimated low-income household energy data based on income, energy expenditures, fuel type, and housing type, in order to help local governments create better energy strategies and programs by improving their understanding of low income housing and energy characteristics. Website: *energy.gov/eere/slsc/maps/lead-tool.*

Home Energy Affordability Map and Solar for All tool from the National Renewable Energy Lab: Data tables and interactive geospatial maps to determine where communities with limited ability to pay for energy reside. Available data layers include health indicators, demographic and housing information, energy efficiency technical potential from the ResStock tool, solar technical potential, susceptibility to extreme weather events, and utility service area boundaries. Website: *maps.nrel.gov/solar-for-all/.*

Local Clean Energy Self-Scoring tool from the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy: Score your community's energy efficiency and renewable energy efforts using the metrics from ACEEE's 2020 City Clean Energy Scorecard, including evaluating local government operations, community-wide initiatives, and buildings, utility, and transportation policies. Website: *aceee.org/toolkit/2021/01/local-clean-energy-self-scoring-tool-version-50.*

Clean Energy Progress Map from Alliance to Save Energy and others: Job and investment numbers in wind, solar, and energy efficiency by county or legislative district. Website: *cleanenergyprogress.com/.*

Climate Equity Data Viewer (beta) from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: Visualizes cumulative environmental impacts overlaid with the geographic distribution of population characteristics (17 measures in all), by census block group. Helps identify the areas most disproportionately impacted, as well as communities that warrant focused outreach effort, for potential policies. Website: *storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/be558ce8cb1f49f98a18d35d36d8156b* .

SolarAPP + (Solar Automated Permit Processing) from the National Renewable Energy Lab and DOE: Speeds up residential rooftop solar installations by allowing instant local authorization. SolarAPP uses standardized plan review software that can run compliance checks and process building permit approvals for eligible simple rooftop solar systems, cutting solar installation costs by up to a third and cutting approval time by a couple of weeks. In Tucson, for instance, permit review times were reduced from an average of 20 days to zero. Website: *solarapp.nrel.gov/.*

Time to start planning for the 2021 building codes:

BETTER SAFETY, BETTER EFFICIENCY, BETTER HOMEOWNER EXPERIENCE

Christine Brinker, Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) energy efficiency policy expert

The 2021 editions of the International Code Council's model building codes have hit the street. Several jurisdictions have already begun the review and adoption process, and several dozen more are planning to.

Updating building codes routinely every three years is essential for:

- Ensuring health, safety, and resiliency.
- Saving homeowners money – the energy code in particular ensures that the monthly energy bills that homeowners and business owners pay is affordable month after month.
- Keeping up with what homeowners and building owners expect.
- Ensuring state-of-the-art, high-quality, and cost-effective building techniques and technologies in your community.
- Cutting construction costs through region-wide code consistency.
- Meeting your jurisdiction's other goals in your comprehensive plans, development plans, and climate plans.

For communities already on the 2018 or 2015 editions of the codes, moving to the 2021 codes will be a relatively easy jump. Most of the changes are minor tweaks for clarification, simplicity, and useability, or incremental improvements in safety, affordability, and efficiency. For communities on the 2012 or 2009 editions of the codes, moving straight to the 2021 code is undoubtedly still the recommended option because it fixes problem areas from the other editions and allows consistency for builders. For communities on the 2006, 2003, or earlier editions, your communities are at high risk of safety and structural issues (not to mention much higher monthly bills) and moving up to the latest code should be moved to high priority. Colorado has seen a wave of smaller and rural communities making the jump from very old codes to modern, updated codes, proving it's feasible, worthwhile, and good for your community's image.

TOP FIVE PIECES OF ADVICE

Cohorts. Consider organizing a working group with your neighboring communities to review and adopt all the codes together. Doing so cuts the costs for builders and developers significantly since they can avoid overhead of trying to meet a patchwork of municipality-by-municipality and county-by-county discrepancies. It also vastly improves the outcomes, since building departments can compare best-practices, talk through challenges with new codes before they arise, and save enforcement costs from better builder compliance.

Energy code. Make sure to update your energy code – state law requires it. Colorado requires each jurisdiction to update to one of the three most recent versions of the energy code upon updating any other building code.

Involve your sustainability coordinator. Nothing is more central to sustainability than the places we live, work, and play. Involving your sustainability coordinator from the beginning makes certain that your community logically connects and coordinates its sustainability goals with its building performance – in particular regarding energy efficiency, water conservation, and resilience against extreme weather.

Future-proofing. Two items in particular should be amended back into your energy code, and were left out of the final editions of the energy code on a process-related technicality. Electric pre-wiring ensures that homeowners can have the choice of installing clean and healthy electric appliances like heat pumps in the future (as opposed to fossil-fueled furnaces and water heaters linked to indoor air pollution, asthma, carbon monoxide poisoning, and explosions). EV-ready wiring means a homeowner can install an EV charger in the future without needing to rip up walls or driveways to put in the wiring. Both provisions were overwhelmingly approved in the International Code Council process by thousands of local government voting officials but overturned at the last-minute by a two-member appeals board with ties to industry. (For the electric-ready code language, see *newbuildings.org/resource/building-decarbonization-code/* and *swenergy.org/pubs/building_electrification*, and for the EV-ready code language see *swenergy.org/transportation/electric-vehicles/building-codes)*.

Training. Make use of free, customized training for both your building department and your builder and trades community, either onsite or virtual. If you are in Xcel territory, start with their free technical assistance for energy codes. If you are outside Xcel territory, request free technical assistance from the Colorado Energy Office on either the energy code or all building codes. Both offer hands-on in-depth expertise from current and former building officials who have won national awards for their support.

STATS

If you're staying up-to-date on building codes every three years, you're in good company. At least 93 jurisdictions are on the 2018 edition, covering 42% of the Colorado population. If we add in the 79 jurisdictions that are on the next-most-recent 2015 edition, altogether these cover 93% of the Colorado population. Don't be left behind: Get a working group of your neighboring communities' building departments and sustainability officials together, along with Xcel's or the state's energy code experts, to start reviewing and queuing up adoption of the latest codes.

City of Aspen

SINGLE-USE BAG BAN AND REUSABLE BAG BANK PROGRAM

By Aspen Climate Mitigation Committee

In May of 2012, the City of Aspen implemented a Waste Reduction Ordinance to eliminate plastic waste and raise awareness around excessive resource consumption.

This ordinance bans the use of single use plastic check out bags at Aspen grocery stores and instates a $0.20 fee for single use paper bags. This action was directed by Aspen City Council as a means to reduce single use plastic bag waste and was informed by single use bag policies in other municipalities across the United States.

Since the ordinance was put in place, the amount of paper bags purchased over time has fluctuated slightly year to year. After an initial adjustment period during the first few years that saw an increase in bags purchased, the most recent data collected shows bag sales are averaging 12%-15% below those highs.

In addition, a visual survey conducted in 2016 found that about 85% of shoppers at Aspen grocery stores were using reusable bags or no bags at all, pointing to an incremental buy-in from the local community. In addition, since the ordinance was put in place, a number of local businesses outside of grocery stores have decided to stop providing plastic bags to customers.

Since the implementation of the plastic bag ban and paper bag fee in May 2012, City of Aspen staff have undertaken a number of innovative outreach programs to support residents and visitors. In an effort to reduce the need for single use paper bags and further educate the local community about waste reduction, the City of Aspen's Environmental Health and Sustainability staff launched a reusable bag bank program in the spring of 2014. Supported by revenues from the single use paper bag fee, the program provides free 100% recycled content reusable bags to locals and visitors at multiple locations throughout town. To date, the program has distributed close to 12,000 reusable bags. At most bag banks, users are encouraged to both take a bag and/or drop off clean bags. Based on Aspen's bag bank experience, we recommend choosing locations that are semi-private and serve a specific and returning subset of the community. Examples of successful locations in Aspen include office buildings, employee locker rooms, and the library.

Near the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the City of Aspen decided to put the reusable bag bank program on hold out of an abundance of caution. At the time, scientific studies indicated a potential risk of disease transmission from plastic surfaces which created some doubt over the safety of reusable bags. At the same time, the plastics industry, capitalizing on this uncertainty, attempted to further push the use of single use plastic bags. During the pause of the program, the city also suspended the $0.20 paper bag fee. The program was relaunched in June of 2021 after new studies demonstrated that reusable bags did not pose a risk to public safety.

The current Aspen City Council would like to expand the waste reduction and diversion efforts in the Aspen community. The next two years will include conversations with the community about additional programs to reduce plastic waste, divert organic waste, and find innovative ways to increase recycling rates

A VISUAL SURVEY IN 2016 FOUND THAT ABOUT 85% OF SHOPPERS AT ASPEN GROCERY STORES WERE USING REUSABLE BAGS OR NO BAGS AT ALL

The end of an era for the MARTIN DRAKE POWER PLANT IN COLORADO SPRINGS

By Natalie Watts, Senior Public Affairs Specialist at Colorado Springs Utilities

On Aug. 27, 2021, Colorado Springs community leaders, elected officials, and staff members from the Martin Drake Power Plant gathered to celebrate a major milestone: the last day the plant used coal to create electricity.

Since the 1920s, the plant has been a prominent part of the Colorado Springs downtown skyline and is one of the last urban-sited coal plants in the country.

The end of coal at the downtown plant was the most recent steppingstone for the utility as it works to achieve goals set forth in its Sustainable Energy Plan.

This plan, which was approved by their Utilities Board in June 2020, will:

- Reduce carbon emissions at least 80% by 2030 and 90% by 2050.
- Retire all coal generation by 2030 and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Integrate new technologies responsibly by modernizing their grid and partner with customers to create distributed energy resources throughout the community.
- Increase renewable energy and incorporate storage resources.

As an interim step, the plant will continue to run on natural gas through the end of 2022. Next year, six natural gas generators will be brought online and will be placed at the same spot where the coal pile was located for decades. The generators will remain there until 2026 when a new transmission line is built, and then they can be moved to other parts of the system.

In 2023, the utility plans to add the Pike Solar and Storage Project to its energy portfolio. This will bring on an additional 175 MW of solar and a 25-MW, four-hour battery energy storage system. When built, it will be the largest solar facility in Colorado Springs Utilities' system.

After adding the Pike Solar project to existing solar, wind, and hydro resources, renewable energy is estimated to represent 27% of Colorado Springs Utilities' energy portfolio.

No decision has been made yet on what will be placed on the site after the Martin Drake Power Plant is demolished, which is still several years away.

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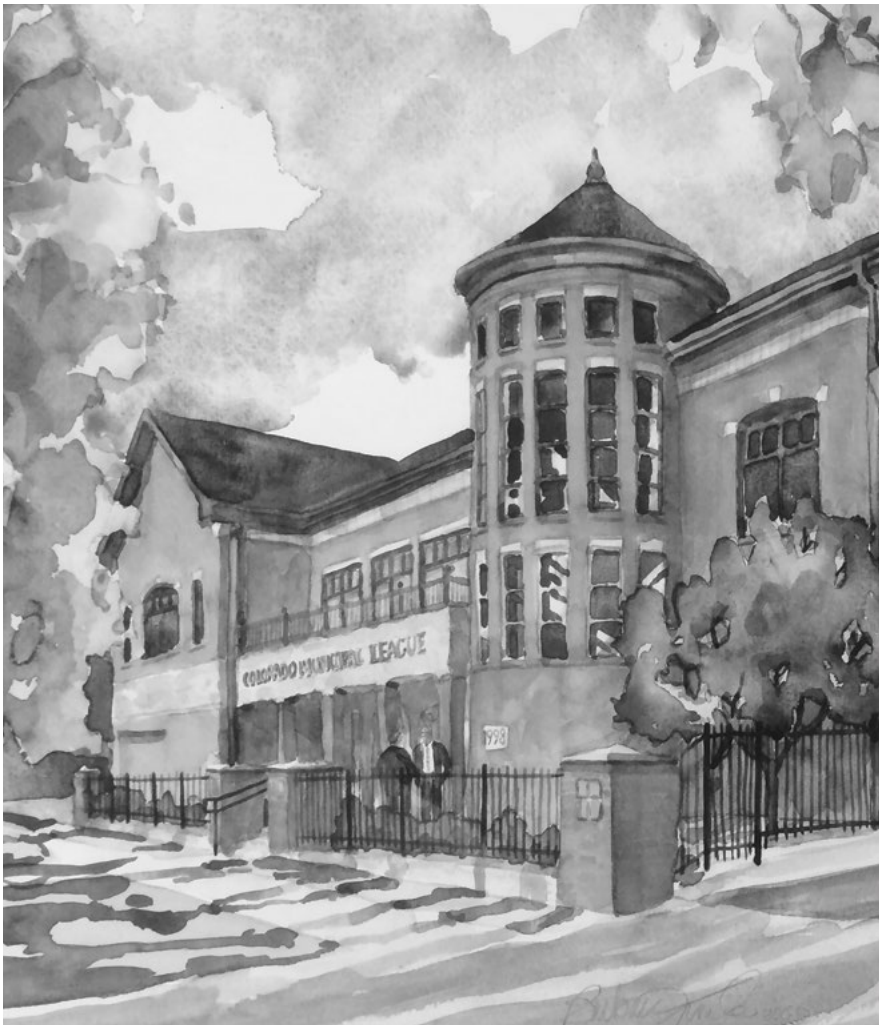

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