

## Climate Crisis Demands Both Mitigation and Adaptation

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Larimer County Commissioner John Kefalas is to be commended for recognizing that we are in a climate crisis (“Climate crisis demands planning and resiliency”, May 30th, 2019). As Kefalas points out, Colorado’s average temperature has increased by 2 degrees F in the past 30 years, and is projected to increase another 2.5 to 5 degrees F by 2050. In this context, it is welcome news that Larimer County’s proposed 20-year Comprehensive Plan incorporates actions to increase community resilience.

However, Kefalas is not correct to say that today’s extreme weather is the “new normal.” If we continue on our business as usual path, the temperature will keep rising even after 2050. In fact, under business as usual, Colorado’s average temperature will increase by a whopping 10 degrees F by the end of this century, and today’s extreme weather may look downright tame in comparison.

Conditions will worsen still further until we begin to reduce our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. And, despite the overwhelming evidence that that crisis has been caused by human activity - mainly the burning of fossil fuels - Kefalas notes merely that “there are various contributing factors.” Even more troublingly, he concludes his commentary by stating that “while we can’t control events, we can still prepare for them.”

Kefalas’s article focuses on the County’s Community Resiliency Program (CRP), which is housed within the Office of Emergency Management. The CRP is tasked with helping County residents adapt to the local impacts of the climate crisis, including increased air pollution, more intense wildfires and heavier floods. He offers suggestions for how people can prepare for these impacts: by signing up to receive emergency alerts; getting to know their neighbors; cutting branches away from their homes; and checking on their insurance coverages. All this is important, but it’s critical to recognize that we – as a society and as a species – will not simply be able to adapt our way out of the climate crisis.

Both the City of Fort Collins and the State of Colorado already recognize that reducing our GHG emissions is a critical component of addressing climate change. Climate policies designed to reduce emissions are referred to under the rubric of “mitigation”, and complement policies geared toward adaptation. (In the context of disaster management, we should note that “mitigation” has a very different meaning, i.e. the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.) Our City has adopted and is making progress toward achieving one of the most ambitious GHG emissions reduction goals in the world: 80% by 2030, compared to 2005 levels. The State recently adopted a less ambitious, but still significant goal of 50% emissions reductions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels.

John Kefalas has acknowledged, both privately and publicly, that we – as a society and as a species - need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in order to slow and ultimately halt the global warming that has led to the present crisis. We urge Commissioners Kefalas, Johnson, and Donnelly to build on the CRP’s adaptation work by following the lead of the City and the State in adopting strong Larimer County goals for GHG emissions reductions. Mitigation and adaptation are both essential components of solving the climate crisis.

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