



Fort Collins Can, Should Reach Fully Renewable Electricity by 2030

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On May 1, Fort Collins Partners for Clean Energy (FCP4CE) presented a resolution to City Council asking council members to adopt the goal of achieving 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030. The editorial written by Kevin Duggan on behalf of the Coloradoan editorial board concerning that resolution is sadly uninformed.

The editorial raises the question of whether relying on renewable sources will jeopardize the affordability and reliability of the electricity supplied by Platte River Power Authority, the city's wholesale power provider. What it failed to mention, even though this made national news in January, is that utility-scale solar and wind are the cheapest forms of new electricity in Colorado.

PRPA discovered this last year: it tripled the amount of wind power it sought last August to 150 megawatts after calculating that adding cheaper renewables will reduce rates charged to owner municipalities by 2 percent to 5 percent in the long haul.

Will the price of renewables continue to be competitive after federal subsidies are removed? According to Lazard, the leading financial analysts in the country, unsubsidized wind is cheaper than all other new sources today; and, as prices continue to fall, unsubsidized solar will soon be as cheap or cheaper than all other sources except wind by 2025.

As for reliability, the Zero Net Carbon (ZNC) study completed by PRPA last year modeled an 80 percent renewable grid scenario with 20 percent of the power provided by a new combined cycle natural gas-fired plant. This scenario met all of PRPA's reliability standards.

The use of utility-scale battery storage – necessary to achieve entirely renewable electricity — sacrifices nothing to gas-fired plants in terms of reliability. Prices in that sector are falling so rapidly that battery

storage is expected to be competitive with gas-fired plants in most markets by 2022, well ahead of 2030. Recent projects in Arizona show that utility-scale Lithium-Ion storage is a technology that is ready and affordable today.

FCP4CE brought the renewable electricity resolution forward after collecting more than 2,000 signatures from Fort Collins residents who support it. Several of the largest employers in town — Colorado State University, Walmart, Anheuser-Busch, Schneider Electric, HP — collectively consume 20 percent of the electricity provided to the city. Each has committed to achieving 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030 or before.

FCP4CE members presented our resolution to City Council after a meeting with PRPA staff to share results from a critique of their ZNC study. PRPA's response? They largely agreed with our conclusions and promised to address them in future modeling efforts. Our coalition has found PRPA to be unflinchingly fair-minded while working with us on this issue.

Make no mistake: the primary motivation for introducing this resolution is to protect our climate and to help the city meet its Climate Action Plan goals, starting with reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, which was unanimously approved by council three years ago. We believe that a fully renewable electricity grid will be essential to meeting that goal.

Getting to fully renewable electricity by 2030 will not be easy. Our coalition is not naive about that. What it will take is honest dialogue and a fair consideration of all relevant facts. We welcome the editorial board of the Coloradoan to engage with us in this effort in the future.

Nick Francis is on the Steering Committee of the Fort Collins Sustainability Group, a member of FCP4CE.