

Open Letter to the Board of Directors of the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce

The following open letter was hand-delivered to the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce on December 18, 2019. We were motivated to write the letter by the Chamber's opposition to the City's recent adoption of a resolution setting the goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2030, its opposition to taking an ambitious approach to climate action planning, and its opposition to the City's municipal broadband initiative. The letter was signed by 21 current and former Chamber members, ten other local business owners and executives, and 83 others for a grand total of 114.

Subject: Becoming the Optimistic Voice of Business Concerning the Opportunities and Threats Facing Northern Colorado

Maintaining and enhancing standards of living and quality of life for the residents of Fort Collins requires that both the public and private sectors play their respective roles and collaborate for the common good. The City government and Fort Collins voters have an established track record for innovation and have made a number of farsighted, forward looking decisions.

Past examples include the decision to underground the City's electric distribution system and the passage of tax measures to develop the City's Natural Areas Program. More recently, City leaders and voters have taken other bold decisions to invest in our community's future, including the adoption of the City's Climate Action Plan; the establishment of a municipal broadband utility; and the passage of a resolution setting a goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2030.

The business community in the Fort Collins area also includes many innovative, forward-looking companies that recognize that their success cannot be decoupled from the health and well-being of the community as a whole. Often, however, the positions taken by the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce work against broader efforts to build a vibrant economy that is also equitable and sustainable. For example, the Chamber actively opposed the City's municipal broadband initiative, mobilizing \$900,000 in a failed attempt to defeat a ballot initiative to approve its establishment. The Chamber then worked to oppose adoption of a resolution setting the goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2030, only to lose when City Council approved the resolution by a 6-1 vote while mandating that this be done without sacrificing affordability and reliability.

On climate change, the Chamber's position is that "Government should move cautiously on legislation and regulations," despite the incontrovertible evidence of the existential threat posed to the well-being of current and future generations. The Chamber should move from its position of "leaving it to the experts on both sides of the climate wars to duke it out" and acknowledge the absolute necessity of climate action at all levels, starting here at home. Rather than critiquing the City's Climate Action Plan as an example of an "unrestrained appetite for big, expensive public policies," the Chamber and the business community as a whole should focus on how it can contribute to achievement of the City's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals and position northern Colorado as a leading innovator in renewable and clean energy and other high-tech industries.

In contrast to its "just say no" position on climate action, 100% renewables and municipal broadband, the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce has been a vocal supporter of auto-centric transportation initiatives, including widening I-25 North, and has supported tax increases where necessary to fund road transportation infrastructure improvements. Given the significant contribution of transportation (25%) to the City's Greenhouse Gas inventory, as well as the large contribution of motor vehicles to the northern Front Range's dangerously high ozone levels, the Chamber should adopt a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to transportation, including support for higher fuel economy standards, fleet electrification, mass transportation, and bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The private sector should seize opportunities for innovation in transport that go beyond our current heavy reliance on the internal combustion engine and road construction.

Just as we appreciate the vision of past City leaders for such initiatives as undergrounding our utilities and expanding the City's natural area program, we believe that future generations will similarly take pride in Fort Collins' ambitious Climate Action Plan and the quality services provided by its municipal water, electric and broadband utilities. The local business community has much to offer to the success of such initiatives and has much to gain from their positive impacts on the health and well-being of the community as a whole.

We encourage the Chamber of Commerce to adhere to its own stated philosophy that "a local business climate that protects and enhances its natural environment can be healthy, productive and prosperous." While the Chamber states that it "supports those measures necessary to protect the natural environment and public health," its position on climate action calls this into question. We call on the Chamber to align its efforts to support forward-looking public sector initiatives and the long-term well-being of the community of which it is an integral part. The Chamber and its members should look for guidance to such organizations as the National Sustainable Business Network, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy, and the Alliance for a Sustainable Colorado.

We, the under-signed business owners, civil society leaders, and residents of the Fort Collins area call on the Chamber of Commerce to review and update its policy positions to bring them more into line with community values. Further, we call on the Chamber to be the optimistic voice of business to address both the opportunities and threats facing our northern Colorado community. In the Chamber's own words: "Economic and environmental objectives are best achieved through orderly compromise rather than conflict and, toward that end; the Chamber seeks to establish positive relationships. Opportunities should be created to allow environmentalists and business representatives to establish areas of agreement, work through problems and develop positive joint initiatives." We believe that now is the time for constructive dialogue among business leaders, local government, and civil society organizations to realize such a vision.

Sincerely,

Current and Former Chamber Members:

Geoff Norby, Owner, Global Accent Translation Services;
Sue McFaddin, President, Seven Generations;
Carol Cochran, Co-founder & Owner, Horse & Dragon Brewing Company;
Tim Cochran, Co-founder & Owner, Horse & Dragon Brewing Company;
Erich Whisenhunt, Director of Food and Beverage, Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant;
Carl Dierschow, Owner, Small Fish Business Coaching;
Richard Perry, Manager Member, Ramplify Sustainable Promotions;
Romia Pritchett, Owner, RC Auto Detail & Carpet Cleaning;
Mike Truitt, Member, Carbon Neutral Group;
Cory Carroll, Family Physician;
Erik Blank, Foster Parent Recruiter and Retention Specialist, SAFY of Colorado;
Silencia Cox, CEO, Motherlove Herbal Company;
Ormond Barstow, Unique Custom Products;
Madeline Kent, Nutritionist and Founder, Sante Health and Wellness;
Thomas Cooley, President, C&H Carpet and Furniture Cleaning Inc.;
Tom List, President, Poudre Education Association;
Adrian Jones, Owner, Frameworks;
Jeff Haber, General Manager, Food and Beverage, Sage Hospitality;
Gina Michelle, Owner, Malama Massage and Bodywork;
Renee Walkup, Business Owner;
Mallory Garneau, Executive Director, FoCo Café;

Other Members of the Business Community:

Pat Murphy, President, On the Road Productions;
Michael Pruznick, Founder and President, PruzLabs LLC;
Tim Gosar, Owner/Investigator, Gosar Investigations;
Phil Friedman, Owner, Solar Professional Services, LLC;
Alex Blackmer, CEO, Solaris Energy;
Nancy York, Owner, Poster It;
Maura Velazquez, Owner, Little Red Hen Farm;
John Anderson, Owner, GarbageBusters;
Jennifer Dayton, Metalsmith, Vanishing Inc.;
Janice Lynn, Owner, Creating, LLC;

All Others:

Kevin Henry, Member, Fort Collins Sustainability Group;
Kevin Cross, Convener, Fort Collins Sustainability Group;
Fred Kirsch, Director, Community for Sustainable Energy;
Ted Walkup, Member, Sierra Club Poudre Canyon Group;
Sonia Koetting, Leader, Climate Justice Ministry of Foothills UU Church;
Will Walters, Concerned Citizen;
Gayla Martinez, Concerned Citizen;
Vicky McLane, Member, Ft. Collins Land Conservation and Stewardship Board;
Elena Lopez, Board Member, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Colorado;
Melissa Rosas, Member, Planning Action To Transform Hughes Sustainably;
Rupert Herrick, Concerned Citizen;
Cheryl Beseler, PhD, Core Leader, 350 Northern Colorado;
Tom Rhodes, Chair, Sierra Club/Poudre Canyon Group;
Kelly Suto, Teacher, Poudre High School;
Edward Behan, Concerned Citizen;
Sue Ellen Klein, Member, Partners for Peace;
Katie Drosim, CSU Student;
Jason Schaefer, Business Manager;
Dimitris Stevis, CSU Professor;
Mary Beck, Retired;
Richard Kommrusch, Retired;
Severin Mangold, CSU Student;
Phillip Chapman, Retired;
P. Gill, Retired;
Wayne Chuang, CSU Researcher;
Leslie Smyser, Teacher;
Bill Timpson, CSU Professor;
Kellee Timpson, Concerned Citizen;
Dan Feig-Sandoval, Concerned Citizen;
Mark Houdashelt, Member, Partners in Climate Action;
Doug Montgomery, Concerned citizen;
Charles Kop, Concerned Citizen;
Shirley Coenen, Coordinator, Fort Collins Community Action Network;
Georgia Locker, Concerned Citizen;
Doug Henderson, Member, Sierra Club/Poudre Canyon Group;
Jane Hamburger, Concerned Citizen;
Dolores Williams, Concerned Citizen;
Bill Steffenhagen, Concerned Citizen;
Denise Steffenhagen, Concerned Citizen;
Robyn Dolgin, Member, Partners for Peace;
Julie Rowan-Zoch, Member, Democratic Socialists of America Ft. Collins;
Sally Dowiat, Member, 350 NoCO;
Keith Ela, Concerned Citizen;
Chester McQueary, Fort Collins resident;
Kenneth Ogan, Concerned Citizen;

Judy Gates, Concerned Citizen;
Shelly Carroll, Concerned Citizen;
Mike Quirk, Fort Collins resident;
Randy Kuehn, Fort Collins resident;
Peg MacMorris, Concerned Citizen;
Dennis Lamb, Inhabitant of Earth;
Ken Orgoglioso, Concerned Citizen;
Shirley White, Member, Foothills Unitarian Church Climate Justice Ministry;
Ruth Grant, Fort Collins resident;
Robert Viscount, Member, Poudre Heritage Alliance;
Gina McCrackin, Director of Environmental Affairs, Associated Students of CSU;
Rick Casey, Member, Fort Collins Sustainability Group;
Emily Gallichotte, Member, Democratic Socialists of America Ft. Collins;
William Sublette, Fort Collins resident, 23 years;
Peggy La Point, Concerned Citizen;
Tom La Point, Concerned Citizen;
Gailmarie Kimmel, Concerned Citizen;
Russ Ayer, Concerned Citizen;
Sarah Snead, Organizing Representative, Sierra Club;
Rose Lew, Member, Fort Collins Sustainability Group;
Nick Francis, Convener, Fort Collins Partners in Climate Action;
Tatum Cochran, Employee, Horse & Dragon Brewing Company;
Trina Cochran, Employee, Horse & Dragon Brewing Company;
David Roy, Former Fort Collins City Councilmember;
Steve Ramer, Pastor, Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship;
Elizabeth Hudetz, Member, Fort Collins Sustainability Group

Note: All text in quotations in this letter come verbatim from Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce documents, web content and opinion pieces published by its President and CEO.