

Renewable Electricity Sources are Affordable and Reliable

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Recently, opponents of Fort Collins committing to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030 have made comments casting doubt on the affordability and reliability of renewable electricity sources. Yet, they fail to support their claims with market-based data from Colorado's energy sector.

Below are important developments from local utilities that have occurred over the last year. They present fundamental facts of the case that opponents of the 100 percent renewable electricity proposal should not ignore.

In 2017, Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) put out a request for proposals to build 50 MWs of new wind power. The all-in price that came back, including transmission, was cheaper than the current operating costs of their two coal plants. They then tripled the amount of wind they sought, calculating that adding new wind would reduce rates by 2.5 – 5 percent.

The 150 MW wind deal PRPA signed includes a new transmission line that PRPA has the opportunity to own. Maps showing national wind resources indicate that Wyoming has some of the strongest wind in the country. Controlling a transmission line to this region will be a great long-term investment for PRPA.

Xcel Energy has also achieved lower rates by adding renewable electricity. Alice Jackson, president of Xcel Energy-Colorado, stated recently that adding renewables to Xcel's energy mix lowered their rates by 9 percent over the last five years.

Recently, Xcel's Colorado Energy Plan (CEP) was approved, calling for Xcel to build over 2 GW of wind, solar and battery storage by 2026, at which time 55 percent of Xcel's electricity will come from renewable energy sources.

The regulatory agency that approved this plan, the Colorado Public Utility Commission (PUC), oversees utilities to ensure that our electricity supply remains reliable and that utility investments result in the best possible deal for the public. What will the impact of Xcel's plan be? \$213 million in savings for Xcel ratepayers.

Xcel is a federally regulated balancing authority. They must provide high-quality, reliable power to all utilities in our section of the grid whenever it is needed. By their decision last month, the PUC obviously sees no issue with the affordability or reliability of renewables in Xcel's plan.

As part of the CEP, Xcel will also install a 260 MW behind-the-meter solar array for EVRAZ, a steel plant in Pueblo County. This addition of solar will guarantee EVRAZ lower, fixed electricity costs and will allow them to stay in the state. They had been threatening to relocate due to higher-than-expected energy costs in Colorado. Obviously, EVRAZ, too, sees no issue with the affordability or reliability of renewables.

What does this evidence mean for PRPA and the city's push to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030?

Based on total generation, 9 percent of PRPA's electricity comes from wind and solar today. Fifteen percent comes from hydroelectricity, a resource Xcel has very little of. If PRPA were to match Xcel's investments in wind, solar and battery storage by 2026 – and we add in the hydro – renewables would be 70 percent of PRPA's total generation mix.

This is doable.

By pursuing large-scale investments in renewables soon, PRPA can save ratepayers money, as Xcel has. It will also lower PRPA's greenhouse gas emissions by over 70 percent and place Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont and Estes Park firmly on the path to 100 percent affordable, reliable and renewable electricity by 2030.

Nick Francis sits on the Steering Committee of the Fort Collins Sustainability Group, which is a member of the Fort Collins Partners for Clean Energy (FCP4CE), a coalition of eight community groups that proposed the 100 percent renewable electricity resolution to the Fort Collins City Council.