

Council should increase emissions reduction goal

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The City of Ft. Collins adopted its first Climate Action Plan in 1999 in recognition of its responsibility to help address global climate change. Each year, the City issues a Status Report to track progress toward meeting its goals. The recently released 2011 Status Report shows that community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions decreased by 14.7% between 2005 and 2011, despite above average population growth. This accomplishment significantly exceeds the Climate Plan short-term goal for 2012, and is something the entire community can be proud of.

Three important lessons can be drawn from the 2011 Status Report, which is available at <http://www.fcgov.com/climateprotection/>. The first is that local government actions can have a significant impact on GHG emissions. The reduction Ft. Collins has achieved since 2005 is nearly double the U.S. reduction of 7.6% over the same time period. City programs that help drive down GHG emissions include ClimateWise, which helps businesses and institutions reduce energy use; the Home Energy Efficiency Program, the residential “Pay-As-You-Throw” Ordinance, which encourages recycling; Transfort, which has seen a 46% increase in ridership since 2005; and the Bicycling Program.

The second lesson to be drawn from the 2011 Status Report is that lower GHG emissions need not come at the expense of economic health. This is shown quite clearly on the first page of the Executive Summary, where changes in GHG emissions are plotted on the same graph as changes in sales and use tax receipts. Ever since the national economy started pulling out of recession in 2009, GHG emissions have moved steadily downward, while sales and use tax receipts have moved steadily upward. The report also notes that Ft. Collins received a 5th “Best Place for Businesses and Careers” ranking from Forbes in 2011. Programs focused on reducing GHG emissions can clearly create economic opportunities for both businesses and individuals.

The third lesson to be drawn from the Status Report is that citizen oversight and involvement are critical to ensuring government accountability. Although the first Ft. Collins Climate Action Plan was put in place in 1999, another graph on the first page of the Executive Summary shows GHG emissions increasing steadily between that year and 2005. Members of the Fort Collins Sustainability Group (FCSG) pointed out this problem in 2005, and successfully advocated for the creation of a Climate Task Force to update the plan and get the City on track toward actually reducing its emissions. The resulting second Climate Action Plan turned the trick; GHG emissions have been on a downward path since its adoption by City Council in late 2008.

The heat waves, droughts, wild fires, and vanishing arctic sea ice of this past summer are all manifestations of anthropogenic global climate change. They demand a dramatic and sustained response by people and governments everywhere. Ft. Collins serves as an important role model for other cities ready to do their part in addressing this problem.

To maintain its forward momentum, Ft. Collins should revise the already-outdated mid-term GHG emissions reduction goal of 20% adopted in 2008. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recommended emissions cuts of 35 – 50% by industrial nations by 2020 with respect to the 2005 baseline. The FCSG urges City Council to consider increasing our goal to a percentage within that range in order to continue leading on this issue.

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