

FCSG Statement on 2017-18 Biennial Budget

Update posted on October 30, 2016

The Fort Collins Sustainability Group (FCSG) is pleased to see that a new budget offer for 365 day per year transit service has been added to the City Manager's original Recommended Budget. This offer will result in a small reduction in community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. We are disappointed, however, that no additional budget offers were included that would have made more significant contributions toward reducing GHG emissions.

According to a memo released by City staff on October 10th, funded budget offers – if sustained over the next four years - would result in emissions reductions of about 163,000 metric tons of equivalent CO₂ by 2020. Those reductions would put us 12.9% below the 2005 baseline level of community-wide emissions – well short of the 20% goal.

In early October, the FCSG recommended that unfunded budget offers 3.17: Trip Reduction and Efficiency Program and 94.1: Wind and Solar Energy for Municipal Operations (if corrected to make sure that new renewable resources are used) be included in the 2017-18 biennial budget. Together, those two offers could have resulted in an additional 31,000 metric tons of CO₂(e) reductions by 2020.

At this point, we are recommending – strongly – that adequate reserves be maintained to allow modified versions of offers 3.17 and 94.1 to be funded in the middle of the upcoming budget cycle. If this is not done, it will be very difficult to meet the 2020 GHG emissions reduction goal. Meeting that goal will be critical if Fort Collins is to achieve its much more ambitious 2030 goal of 80% emissions reductions compared to 2005 levels. We hope that this council will be remembered as the one that acted decisively to meet our climate goals – not as the one that grew complacent and allowed our City to miss those goals.

Original statement posted on October 3, 2016

The Fort Collins Sustainability Group (FCSG) has reviewed both the City Manager's Recommended Biennial Budget for 2017-18 and staff's analysis of how budget offers included in the first document align with the City's 2020 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goal. We are recommending further consideration of three budget offers that are currently "below the line" (i.e. not recommended for funding) that would help achieve that goal.

First, we note that the budget offers included in the City Manager's recommended budget would result in approximately 163,000 metric tons of additional CO₂(e) emissions reductions by 2020 if funded in both the 2017-18 and 2019-20 biennial budgets. These reductions would help lower total community-wide emissions by roughly 12.9% compared to the 2005 baseline. Since the goal for 2020 is a 20% emissions reduction, there is clearly considerably more work that must be done in the next four years to achieve that goal.

The two unfunded budget offers that could contribute most significantly to closing the gap are 3.17: Trip Reduction and Efficiency Program and 94.1: Wind and Solar Energy for Municipal Operations (if an existing flaw in that offer is addressed). Together, these two offers could result in an additional 31,000 metric tons of CO₂(e) reductions by 2020. Additionally, the FCSG supports funding 67.11: Sunday Transport Service. This item would result in an additional 23 metric tons of CO₂(e) emissions per year. Although this is a relatively small number, we believe that the social benefits of providing Sunday service are high enough to warrant bringing this item above the line.

Offer 3.17 would pay for a study by a consulting firm that would result in incentive programs to reduce motor vehicle use and thereby reduce GHG emissions from the transit sector. Some of these incentive programs would be “no-cost,” and could be implemented immediately. If fully funded in the next two budget cycles, this offer would result in a CO₂(e) reduction of about 11,000 metric tons by 2020. If the budget does not support full funding of this item, the FCSG recommends approval of a scaled-back version that could then be scaled up in the next biennial budget to help meet the 2020 climate goal.

Offer 94.1 would dedicate City funds to purchasing renewable energy from the Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) to meet all of the electricity needs of all City departments. Unfortunately, as currently written, this offer does not require the PRPA to develop any new renewable capacity or purchase any new renewable energy. Renewable energy currently purchased by Ft. Collins Utilities would simply be reallocated from residential and commercial use to municipal use, meaning there would be no net GHG emissions reductions. This flaw should be addressed by requiring that the renewable energy used in municipal operations come from new sources. Additionally, since this is a relatively expensive budget offer (approximately \$1 Million per year), the FCSG recommends scaling it back to meet 25% of municipal electricity needs in 2017 and 50% of municipal electricity needs in 2018, with an eye to meeting 100% of municipal electricity needs with renewable energy by 2020. Doing this would produce emissions reductions of 20,000 metric tons CO₂(e) by that year.

Finally, Offer 67.11 would provide funds to operate MAX, key bus routes, and complementary paratransit service on Sundays. While this offer is projected to result in relatively low GHG emissions reductions, it would significantly increase the usefulness of the public transit system for Fort Collins residents. This is another “scalable” offer, although we believe that it is important to provide service on some key bus routes and complementary paratransit services in addition to MAX service if the offer is scaled back to preserve equity.

The FCSG believes that by and large, the City Manager’s recommended budget would do a good job of improving services and reducing community-wide GHG emissions. Fixing Offer 94.1, and providing full or partial funding for all three offers as outlined above would significantly improve the impact of the budget, and we encourage council to find ways to fund each of them.

The Math:

1. Reductions to meet 2020 goal: 330,000 MT (from Road to 2020 Memo dated 10/10/16).
2. 2020 reductions for “funded” initiatives: 163,000 MT (same source).
3. Gap = 330,000 MT – 163,000 MT = 167,000 MT.

4. 2005 Baseline: 2,340,000 MT (From 2014 CAP Status Report).
5. Gap/Baseline = $167,000/2,340,000 = 7.1\%$.
6. Projected reduction in 2020: $20\% - 7.1\% = 12.9\%$.

Offers 3.17 and 94.1 (modified) could gain us another 1.3% reduction by 2020 (Road to 2020 Memo).

Organics composting (to be considered in 2017) could gain us another 2% reduction by 2020 (same source).