

THE ASPEN TIMES

Aspen mandate: green, lean and clean

City government looking at ways to require less energy consumption

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February 13, 2008

ASPEN — Aspen city government intends to make developers and residents accountable for how much energy they use by limiting them through legislation and charging them for exorbitant consumption.

Elected leaders hope individuals will reduce their environmental footprints voluntarily. But in the event they don't, city officials are taking measures to require developers to meet standards that limit their environmental impacts. And through tiered electric rates, residents will be encouraged to consume less through monetary disincentives.

The City Council on Tuesday gave City Hall's "green team" the go-ahead to draft legislation that requires new development applications to include a carbon footprint statement showing that the project does not add greenhouse gas emissions and can mitigate other negative impacts such as air pollution from traffic.

The statement would address how much the development would generate in vehicle trips, PM-10 levels, greenhouse gases, other pollutants, energy consumption, and stormwater and solid waste generation.

Whether developers would provide an environmental footprint analysis when they file for a building permit application or whether it would be reviewed for approval at the council level has not yet been determined.

The criteria to meet environmental standards, which have not yet been created, would apply to all development equally. However, buildings would be categorized by class: residential, commercial, government and hospitals, for example.

Developers also would be required to recycle or salvage a percentage of demolition materials from the buildings they tear down. Ten percent was suggested by city staff, but some council members feel that's not enough.

"I know there's a lot of crap that comes out of these buildings that could be reused," said city Councilman Jack Johnson.

Lee Cassin, the environmental health director for the city of Aspen, said developers have told her that it's not practical and is cost prohibitive to recycle materials from a building that's being torn down because it's labor intensive, for instance, to remove nails from beams so they can be reused.

"Almost none of it is being diverted [from landfills]," Cassin said, adding that Pitkin County officials are looking at a program to grind the material before it hits the county dump.

City Hall's chief building officer Stephen Kanipe plans to introduce to the council this spring a Renewable Energy Mitigation Program (REMP) for commercial buildings. That program would levy a one-time impact fee on developers who exceed their "energy budget."

Currently, REMP applies to large homes throughout Pitkin County and the standard amenities that come with them — heated driveways, hot tubs and swimming pools.

The program has generated at least \$7 million in impact fees since its inception in 2000. The money goes directly back into the community, funding dozens of environmental programs and projects that will take an estimated million pounds of greenhouse gases out of the air every year.

Public Works Director Phil Overeynder is working on a proposal that would raise Aspen Electric's tiered rates, which charge consumers according to their usage.

The tiered rates could allow all electric users a certain number of kilowatt hours at one price, but over a certain amount (to be determined by a home's square footage), the price for electricity would go up.

That excess revenue would then be funneled into a city program that would offer subsidized energy audits for home and building owners that could result in them taking measures to reduce their consumption, and save money in the long run.

"I'm very interested in using the market," said Mayor Mick Ireland. "Tiered rates work and we should push Holy Cross to do the same."

In order to determine how much energy is being consumed now, council members debated on whether to make home energy ratings voluntary or involuntary. Those audits can cost between \$400 and \$800, said City Hall's global warming project manager, Kimberly Peterson.

Under a voluntary approach, the city could subsidize residential energy audits and offer a package of improvements that would reduce citizens' consumption and utility bills.

City officials acknowledge that energy consumption behaviors are unlikely to change unless mandated by government. And as Ireland pointed out, cost savings on utility bills is small change for many wealthy Aspen homeowners.

Peterson said that when Aspen Electric offered free energy audits last year, only a dozen people participated.

The goal through the proposed measures and others to come, is that by 2020, all residents, businesses, developers, visitors and special events in Aspen will be contributing to the effort of reducing greenhouse gasses by 30 percent — a goal of the city's Canary Action Plan.

Aspen would not be the first city to take on such bold measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Other cities, including San Francisco, Berkeley, Calif., Boulder, Colo., and Austin, Texas, have or will take similar steps.

Johnson said he wants more information on what those cities have done before making any commitments to the measures proposed Tuesday.

Cassin and Peterson will bring that information, as well as draft legislation, to the council in the near future.

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