



Community Benefits Plan – Job Quality and Equity

Award Number: DE-EE0010948

Fort Collins Utilities Energy Services & City of Fort Collins Building Services
Zero Carbon Performance Code Implementation

Project Overview

This project will use City of Fort Collins, Colorado, for the development, adoption and implementation of a guide to serve as a model for other jurisdictions and a proposed zero-carbon code structured for inclusion as an appendix to a future version of the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC).

Background

This project may, on the surface, appear to be focused primarily on a regulatory framework to improve building performance. It's important to understand that the genesis of the effort comes from a long history of community-driven climate action and environmental justice efforts. This culminated recently in Fort Collins adoption of the Our Climate Future (OCF) plan in 2021. OCF is a framework for creating the carbon neutral, zero waste and 100% renewable electricity future we desire while improving our community equity and resilience. Our Climate Future articulates an unwavering commitment to mitigating and adapting to climate change with a comprehensive approach that puts people first. Our Climate Future embodies a systems-approach for solutions to address climate, energy and waste goals while positively impacting the daily lives of residents, business operations and supporting community-defined sustainability priorities to:

- Draw down greenhouse gas emissions, waste and energy use, while increasing renewable electricity, carbon sequestration and waste prevention;
- Co-create and share community leadership to develop partnerships for implementation;
- Adapt to a changing climate to improve community resilience;
- Plan for investment in a portfolio of strategies which provide net benefits;
- Ensure all parts of the community are included and see themselves in the solutions proposed; and
- Track the goals to measure success and progress toward achieving sustainability and resilience.

People First

OCF recognizes that when we redesign our efforts to put people, their communities, and community priorities at the center, with technical solutions serving and uplifting those priorities, climate action becomes a catalyst for addressing all kinds of challenges, from affordable housing, to a healthy economy, to convenient ways to get around. Our strategies are designed to meet our community's needs and our environmental goals at the same time, allowing us to have a greater impact overall. It also means we can continue our ambitious work toward mitigating climate change while also preparing us for the increasing effects of climate change. As we make this about each of us and what we care most about, we create space for more partners, leaders, and perspectives at the table and increase the effectiveness, innovation, and scale of what is possible in the next ten, twenty, and thirty years.

The City of Fort Collins has long recognized the importance of building energy codes (codes) as an effective strategy for improving the performance, health and safety of the built environment. The City adopted the first set of local amendments specific to energy, climate and health in 2010. These local amendments have continued such that Fort Collins requirements consistently are advanced beyond those of the national codes. In 2022, Fort Collins adopted the 2021 ICC codes with amendments that advance requirements for energy efficiency, building electrification and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

This local amendment strategy has been paired with consistent training and education for plan reviewers, inspectors, builders, developers and trades with a focus on achieving the intended outcomes with high compliance rates. In addition, as a municipal utility, Fort Collins Utilities is able to track and report on the energy performance improvements associated with energy code adoption cycles with detailed data and building characteristics. The strategy to develop Zero Carbon Building Codes by 2030 was identified in the OCF plan when adopted in 2021. In the fall of 2022, it was highlighted to the Fort Collins City Council as an essential component of their Council Action Roadmap to achieve the necessary savings from the buildings sector to reach the community's emissions goals.

1. Community and Labor Engagement

This project will use enhanced versions of Fort Collins use of best practices for community and industry engagement. Each code review cycle includes a code review committee which meets for four to six months in order to carefully review each new section of language in the body of ICC codes. This includes the IECC for energy. The committee is made up of stakeholders from a wide range of the local development, building, consumer and environmental representatives.

This committee makes recommendations to staff, who in turn develop the draft language for any local amendments to the newly published codes. The public engagement process also includes staff presentations to multiple advisory boards and commissions, such as the Building Review Board, Land Use Commission, Energy Board, Water Commission and Economic Advisory Board. These boards are made up of community members who advise City Council on upcoming policy initiatives. This project can also rely on a robust set of internal and external partnerships to ensure that the input received includes the direct lived experience of historically disadvantaged community members.

- *Our Climate Future, Big Move #1: Shared Leadership and Community Partnership*
 - Instead of continuing to treat climate action like a math problem that only requires technical solutions, this Big Move focuses on the changes needed to ensure our efforts are influenced by and support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other economically disadvantaged and historically underserved community members, to ensure they all have equitable access to the same resources and opportunities as other parts of the community.
 - Additionally, this Big Move is the acknowledgment that the City is one of many actors working toward Our Climate Future's emissions, waste, and energy goals, and we can't and aren't doing it alone. You've learned construction is coming, what do you do?
- *Fort Collins Development Review and Building Services Departments*

- Development and building projects in Fort Collins are supported by dedicated staff and resources for successfully navigating the City's requirements and processes.
- **Fort Collins Economic Health Office**
 - The Economic Health Office (EHO, part of the Sustainability Services Department) offers a wide range of services in support of local labor and business development and resilience. Examples include:
 - A Construction Toolkit created as a helpful resource for our community-based business owners during public or private construction projects. The Toolkit offers fresh ideas from other businesses who managed successfully through construction projects.
 - EHO has a wide range of partners directly relevant to this project. The team will be able to collaborate with these partners with the support of EHO.
 - Downtown Development Authority
 - Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Larimer County Economic Development & Workforce Center
 - Larimer Small Business Development Center
 - NoCo REDI (Regional Economic Development Initiative)

2. Investing in the American Workforce

Fort Collins has developed several community and statewide partnerships that provide for regular interactions with the local and regional building industry. These include Colorado State University's (CSU) Institute for the Built Environment, CSU School of Construction Management, Northern Colorado Home Builders Association, Southwest Energy Efficiency Project, and the Colorado Energy Office. Each of these partnerships have enabled collaborative training offerings that allow us to reach a more diverse audience and one that spans across the industry. Recognizing that successful performance outcomes are dependent on a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, and one that has a voice in the process we aim to further bolster and emphasize an integrated process and integrated design as a beneficial approach to achieving success. Through one of the previously mentioned partnership trainings it was presented that *"Innovation happens when new ideas from outside our field of expertise come in and disrupt our standard way of thinking. We need connections to diverse team members in order for this to happen"*. It's this ideal that will be central to decisions made during the development of the goals within the proposal and establishing a collective voice in a changing approach to building.

Fort Collins Buildings Services and Utilities also provide ongoing on-call support throughout the design, submittal, construction and inspection processes. This hands-on approach provides on-site education that reaches the employees who are performing the work leading to changes in practices in the field. Combined with the more formal education, training and published guides, this model results in documented higher levels of compliance with code.

3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)

Fort Collins Office of Equity & Inclusion was created in August of 2021. The Equity Office is carefully weaving together the community context to best understand the equity landscape and plan for the work ahead of us. This is highly collaborative, multi-faceted work that depends on strong partnerships and open, ongoing community dialogue. We invite all voices.

The Office of Equity & Inclusion proudly operates with a people-centered, community-focused approach. Our goal is to listen and integrate diverse community voices, opinions, and beliefs on equity issues affecting our community. It is our determination to dismantle racial disparities and increase equitable access so that persons of all identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities can fully participate in City services and experience equitable community outcomes. This project is able to access the relationships and knowledge of the Equity Office in development and deployment of the community engagement plans. Ensuring we have inclusion of on-the-ground workers who are familiar with the building process will help to advise the practical aspects of construction that often are the difference between intent and actual performance.

While this project is not directly hiring staff for design and construction, the education and training will also incorporate the best practices and principles for advancing DEIA in the building industry.

We designed Our Climate Future with the goal of equitable solutions that address a spectrum of needs within our community. Leading with race means we recognize that the most disparate outcomes in our country follow racial lines, and Fort Collins is no exception. An emphasis on racial disparities is a starting place for inclusion as we expand to bring in all marginalized populations and all parts of our community. This approach is intentional about addressing barriers and designing solutions that work for those most impacted, while also ensuring all community members can benefit, participate, and influence outcomes.

4. Justice40 Initiative

Fort Collins is the ideal location for this project scope with a long history of climate action planning and initiatives that demonstrate long-standing support from the community and City Councils. This commitment includes deep understanding of the current impacts of historical bias that manifests in disadvantaged communities. These disadvantaged communities may be geographically identified but that is not the only measure or metric. Fort Collins is a medium sized city of approximately 180,000 residents in the Northern Colorado Front Range. It is anticipated that Fort Collins will continue to grow to approximately 250,000 people by 2040, with associated building and housing needs.

Leveraging the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, Fort Collins has one census tract that is identified as disadvantaged. Known locally simply as “North College” this area has characteristics of lower income, high utility bill burden and higher risks for climate losses due to natural disasters. Colorado’s EnviroScreen (Environmental Justice Mapping Tool) has a more detailed view of Fort Collins with characteristics including income, people of color and housing burden in addition to environmental risks. Figure 1 below shows a snapshot from this tool covering Fort Collins.

This project will impact ALL new construction in Fort Collins after adoption of the 2024 code. This is true of affordable and market rate housing, both single family and multifamily. With

housing availability, affordability (combined as attainability) acknowledged as one of the highest priorities for Fort Collins, reducing the utility burden and increasing resilience through codes will benefit all residents. To the extent that affordable housing is emphasized in land use, the benefit for disadvantaged communities is enhanced.

Fort Collins Housing Strategic Plan was adopted in 2021 with a vision that “Everyone has healthy, stable housing they can afford”. The Plan includes four components:

- **Everyone:** Challenges Fort Collins to assess who does and does not have healthy, stable, or affordable housing today and design strategies to ensure a person’s identity or identities is not a predictor of whether they, or our community, achieve this vision.
- **Healthy Housing:** Addresses physical and mental well-being inside and outside of the home.
- **Stable Housing:** Recognizes housing is the most important platform for pursuing all other life goals (known as “Housing First”), and that a secure place to live is a fundamental requirement for quality of life and well-being.
- **Afford(able) Housing:** Ensures an adequate supply so community members do not spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing.

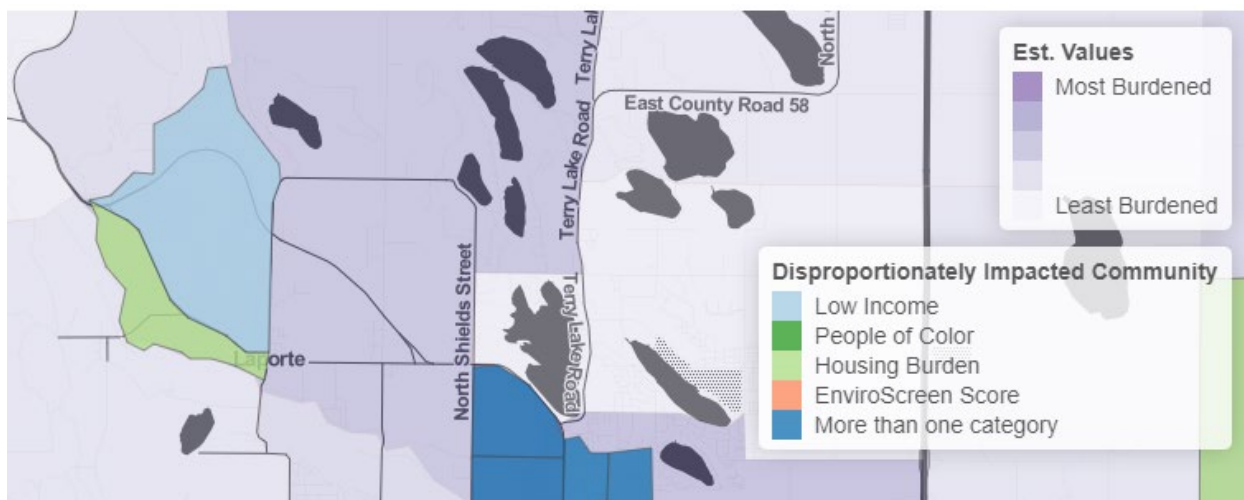


Figure 1: Colorado EnviroScreen Excerpt for Fort Collins

Community Benefits Milestones

- Performance period 1: Form a 20 member stakeholder group and validate a minimum DEIA representation of two members that have a vested interest in building code, new construction and affordability. Document DEIA representation and engagement with Fort Collins code development, review and code adoption through City Council processes.
- Performance period 2: Present draft rapid review process of submittals and construction practices to the stakeholder group. Documented feedback will inform the final plan.
- Performance period 3: Document DEIA representation and engagement with Fort Collins code development, review and code adoption through City Council processes. Document performance of homes built under the revised codes and benefits for disadvantaged community members.