

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
Western Region Sustainability Roundtable Meeting
Grand Junction
June 30, 2009

Report

Description of the Region

The Western region of Colorado (as defined by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs) includes Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Moffat, and Rio Blanco counties. This area is well known for its natural scenic wonders and boasts a geologically diverse area of fossil-rich sandstone cliffs, red rock mesas, flattop wilderness areas and snow capped mountain peaks with high alpine lakes. Grand Junction serves as the population center for this region, home to more than 120,000 residents. But leave the big city and you can experience a diverse array of vineyards, geothermal hot springs, ski resorts, a dinosaur quarry, and rafting down the Colorado River.

The sheltered valleys of western Colorado are very fertile and the climate is generally mild. In addition to exceptional fruit orchards and vineyards, this agriculturally important area produces vegetables, wheat, spring grains, alfalfa, and some sugar beets. At the higher western elevations, livestock is the most important agricultural activity. Cattle raising dominates ranches and grazing on public lands, but large herds of sheep are also found, especially in the semiarid northwestern portion of the State.

While western Colorado communities do well with tourism, energy development has emerged as a major driver in this area's economy. Oil and gas equipment dot the landscape. A Socioeconomic Analysis and Forecast Report commissioned by AGNC and DOLA and released in April 2008 summed up its issues and challenges as follows:

Northwest Colorado is in the first decade of an extraordinary period of challenges, risks and opportunities. As the focal point of one of the largest "gas plays" in North America—as well as the center of potential U.S. oil shale production further in the future—economic activity in this mostly rural region is rapidly expanding. But the region is severely challenged by the pace, locations and nature of these growth pressures. With proactive regional efforts, local commitment to solving difficult challenges and ongoing technical and financial support from state and federal sources, the region has the potential to capitalize on this extraordinary period, maintain economic diversity and develop high quality, sustainable communities.

Participants

The **Northwestern Region Sustainability Roundtable** was co-sponsored by *Western Colorado Congress* and *Green Guides of the Grand Valley* and facilitated by the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado. The meeting was held at The Commons Hilltop Garden Room, Grand Junction and lunch was generously donated by Chipotle Co.

Forty-three local community leaders participated in the 3.5 hour workshop on June 30 and included representatives from nonprofit, business, government and academic sectors. Local government officials represented Mesa County, City of Grand Junction City Council, Downtown Development Authority, Public Works and Planning, and the City of Rifle.

Business representatives included Fruita Chamber of Commerce and the Alpine Bank Green Team; a range of western slope businesses offering consulting, lending, landscape and planning, and accounting solutions; or focused on solar energy, curbside and lifespan technology recycling, green car-washing, energy conservation for existing buildings, home energy audits, and a cloth diaper service.

Prominent local nonprofit organizations involved with social, economic and environmental justice; providing a local green business network; Western Colorado wildlife and land conservation; cultural preservation; and Housing Resources were present.

Education representatives from Mesa State College, University of Colorado, and Mesa County Valley School District participated.

Private citizens including a local columnist reporting on sustainability issues for the last 20 years in the Grand Junction area and a web developer focusing on community communications regarding sustainability attended.

Overview of Mesa County Sustainability Efforts, by County Commissioner Steve Acquafresca

1. *Grand Valley Transit*: A bus system with 11 routes serves a segment of our population that needs public transportation, such as people coming out of community corrections and social service systems; these individuals rely on mass transit to keep their jobs. Ridership this year is up 20% and we anticipate routine increases.
2. *Colorado Riverfront Trail*: The county is excited about this multi-modal transportation option and is pushing for completion. It is viewed as more than a recreational biking and hiking trail, but also seen as ‘transportation artery’ from getting from the east to the west part of valley. Major portions completed- 29 Road to

- east that goes through an area that is reclaimed gravel pits and that are now small lakes and ponds, re-vegetated, and contains prolific wildlife. The goal is to complete the full trail from Palisade to Fruita in the next four years. That will only happen with the cooperation of municipal and other riverfront partners.
3. *Methane-landfill Collection System:* Mesa County has made a commitment to develop a methane-collection system from the “solid waste campus”. Geotechnical specialists researched the methane-production potential and confirmed there is very good potential for a viable collection system. Another contract has been signed to put an underground facility under the landfill system and collect methane for approximately one year to measure for quality and quantity and to determine precisely how much energy it generates. The goal is to tie the energy into an electrical generator to power the new county building facilities. It will be a bonus if electricity can be put back into the grid.
 4. **Jon Peacock, County Administrator:** Landscape on stimulus dollars – the rules for distribution of dollars are being clarified, we have a 120 day extension of application. Looking at energy efficient projects with 15yr payback (energy services contracting study on efficiency of buildings). Additional projects with 20-25 year payback have also been identified. County is considering using some funds to address longer-term maintenance issues of conservation projects. The Governor’s Energy Office would like to see a broader-based plan, so the county is looking at Energy-star programs, community education, Riverfront trail, and other ideas.

Sustainability Discussion by Participants

Question 1: *What local sustainability efforts are in place and working?*

- **Recycling**
 - (1) *Curbside Recycling Indefinitely:* A locally owned business that provides residential curbside recycling in partnership with the City of Grand Junction. Electronics waste drop-off is available six days a week with an attendant on-site to help off-load items. Collection is also available for local businesses, schools and churches through the commercial program.
 - (2) *Organic Materials Composting Facility:* The facility accepts organic waste free-of- charge (avoids landfill disposal fees) and then provides high-quality compost products for sale (closes the loop).
- **Energy and Resources**
 - (1) *Garfield New Energy Communities Initiative:* A \$1.6 million grant was awarded to a partnership of local governments and nonprofits in Garfield County as part of a new energy efficiency initiative. This project consists of providing energy efficiency measures and developing renewable sources of energy for public facilities, homes and small businesses; creating highly visible renewable energy demonstration projects; conducting outreach to the community with programs and

resources; and plans for the revitalization of a three block area in Grand Junction's downtown utilizing smart growth concepts of compact, urban development.

- (2) *City of Grand Junction [Conserving our Resources Efficiently \(CORE\) Program](#)*. This group was formed to assess and monitor the progress of proposed initiatives and current conservation practices in all City operations. These efforts focus on the mobility/fleet, energy and buildings/facilities, PV solar installations, converting digester gas to compressed natural gas that could be used in vehicles (Persigo CNG Project), an employee education program with incentives/mandates/competition, and developing programs to reduce, reuse, and recycle.
 - (3) *[Drought Response Information Project](#) (DRIP)*: A collaboration between the valley's domestic water providers and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public concerning the Drought Response Plan, the importance of water conservation, and how to reduce water use.
 - (4) KAFM became the Grand Valley's first [solar-powered radio station](#) in 2008, generating enough electricity to power the station's broadcast studio and KAFM's monthly Radio Room concerts.
- **Local Food and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)**
 - (1) *[Farmer's markets](#)*: Offer fresh fruits and veggies, artisans and vendors and can be found June-September throughout the western slope (Grand Junction, Palisade, Paonia, Fruita, etc.).
 - (2) *[Cameron Place Community-Supported Agriculture](#)*: Cameron Place CSA provides over 150 families with organically grown vegetables and fruit across Mesa County.
 - (3) *[Simply Grown](#)*: Located in Palisade, SG offers all naturally-grown, hand-picked fruit, vegetables and assorted herbs. Items can be pre-ordered and picked up at the local farmers market.
 - (4) The *Downtown Development Authority* and [LiveWell Mesa County](#) are partnering to give tickets/vouchers to people who meet their quarterly personal LiveWell goals to be spent with farmers and farmer's markets for local, healthy food.
 - **Green Building**
 - (1) The [Grand Junction Comprehensive Community Planning](#) includes concentrated growth within neighborhoods with commercial and retail centers; allows for public transportation from node to node to work; and creates neighborhoods where you Work-Live-Play.
 - (2) Implementation of the [Grand Mesa ENERGY START New Homes Program](#), whose primary objective is to both increase consumer awareness of energy efficiency options in residential new construction and to actively support all participating local ENERGY STAR homebuilders.
 - (3) *[Housing Resources of Western Colorado](#)*: This long-standing nonprofit corporation provides affordable housing for those with low to moderate income and promotes the wise and sustainable use of resources. Their weatherization and educational program across 8 western Colorado counties provides energy saving measures such as furnace tune-up, window replacements, and insulation improvements.

- (4) [Chipeta Elementary](#) in Mesa County School District 51 is LEED-Registered and seeking Silver certification for new construction features that resulted in 30% water reduction, 35% sustainable energy production from a roof PV solar system and wind power program, and 36% of the site is vegetative open space.
- **Transportation**
 - (1) [Grand Valley Transit](#) is far-reaching and with good ridership. It operates 11 routes that serve Grand Junction, Palisade, Clifton, Orchard Mesa and Fruita. Every bus is equipped with bike racks with bike transport free of charge.
 - (2) Around 60 school buses in several school districts across Garfield County were [retrofitted](#) in the summer of 2009 with new equipment that will reduce emissions, cut fuel consumption and make busses safer for students.
 - **Business:** [Green Guides of the Grand Valley](#) provides a directory of green and sustainable businesses for the Grand Valley. The organization aims to provide education amongst the businesses within the network and to the community. They also hold a monthly meeting at Mesa State College in partnership with the college's sustainability council.
 - **Open Space Conservation:** [Mesa Land Trust](#) efforts have resulted in preserving over 55,000 acres that provides local food production (orchards, vineyards, cropland), large working ranches and wildlife (deer, elk, and sage grouse) and riparian habitat.
 - **Academic Sustainability:** [Mesa State College](#) has a pending LEED Gold certification for its new Learning Center, which utilizes a ground source heating and cooling system. Student efforts to implement curbside recycling and bins on campus.
 - [City of Rifle](#) is rebranding itself as the "Energy Village". Recent sustainability efforts include:
 - (1) Wastewater treatment and raw water pumps are solar powered.
 - (2) All new buildings are built to LEED standards with Energy Star Habitat demonstration homes to teach energy efficient building practices to local contractors.
 - (3) Active in re-write of Colorado Renewable Energy Standard regulations at the Colorado Public Utilities Commission.
 - (4) Rifle Mayor Keith Lambert was recently named to Governor Ritter's Climate Change Advisory Panel.
 - (5) City Council recently approved signing a performance contracting MOU with the Governor's Energy Office and considering a local solar PV/Thermal sales and use tax rebate program to encourage the deployment of renewable energy.
 - (6) Local Arts Council donated land and water for a community garden that is now flourishing.
 - (7) A Biomass feasibility study is underway.
 - (8) Pursuing the development of a green industrial park.

Question 2: *Which opportunities are ripe for development? and What is needed to get them going?*

- **Energy and Resources**

- (1) Pursue the development of *Improvement District Financing*, which requires checking that codes are compatible and potentially seeding with stimulus money. To follow the [Boulder model](#) and get approved as a ballot issue requires a grass roots initiative and local government buy-in and participation. Roundtable participants suggested possible leaders such as Western Colorado Community Funding, High Noon Solar, COSEIA, and Housing Resources.
 - (2) [Architecture 2030 Plan](#): Proposes “using energy efficiency incentive grants to buy down the interest rate on home mortgages used to buy new energy efficient homes or to remodel existing homes to meet energy efficiency standards”.
 - (3) *ARRA Funded Workforce Training*: Partnering local training entities (Western Conservation Congress, career center, workforce center) and utilizing expertise within the community to train unskilled workers for energy efficient and renewable energy industries.
 - (4) *Solar Technology*: Western slope has 5.5hr days out of 6 available sunlight – ripe for development for solar manufacturing and distribution.
 - (5) *Recycling Event Coordinator*: Create a paid position within Grand Junction city’s recycling program to organize all events (there are too many) and capture the most recyclables possible.
- **Green Building**
 - (1) Re-educate builders and construction industries to do ‘green’ homes with both new and existing construction.
 - (2) *Green Mortgage Lending*: There is a lot of opportunity to provide funding loans for the “green needs” life, infrastructure and homes/development.
 - (3) *Construction and Demolition Waste*: Create capacity for recycling and reusing construction waste. Requires onsite separated bins, partnership with landfill for networking between groups that could use each other’s waste (i.e., send waste to Habitat for Humanity). Get waste haulers to participate affordably; need to advocate public/private partnerships with an emphasis on re-use (LEED certified projects already have to revise).
 - **Local Food**: There is an initial emerging partnership involving Western Colorado Congress, CSU-Extension Service, and Mesa County to look at the feasibility of a local food co-op.
 - **Transportation**: Encourage car pooling and buying smaller vehicles right here in Mesa County. Revamp the bus routes to eliminate circular routes to make it more efficient. Incorporate bike lanes into new and existing roads and expand routes.
 - **Local Sustainability Entity**: Need a centralized body to coordinate sustainability efforts in this region (Alliance satellite). Also requires an organized structure, established long-term goals, a definable project with reasonable success which can serve as green energy advocates and can coordinate marketing efforts. Don’t start from scratch, utilize already established organization (ideally a neutral organization that can promote Triple Bottom Line—People·Planet·Profit) and their resources, and/or individuals who already have an established credibility, expertise and relationships with government and community (suggestions include Jim Spehar, and Housing Resources). Best example is Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER) in Carbondale.

- **Education and Innovation:** Critical to invest in this generation’s education – breed the next Benjamin Franklin (Colorado Math and Sciences Center).
- **Public Access Channel:** A great way to reach many folks and create access for sustainability information and programs for the public.
- **Local Procurement:** Use local companies for new government-funded energy efficiencies and renewable energy development.

Question 3: *What steps will you take to foster these sustainability opportunities? and How will you utilize your sustainability network?*

- Create region-appropriate language for ‘sustainability’ and that communicates a consistent message. In this region, sustainability is more defined as “self-sufficiency” - arguing to only 20-50% of this community if you are using “climate change” as your focus point. Develop a post-oil cheap and viable plan. Sustainability is a broad umbrella – do we need an organization to organize the organization?
- Develop an internet-based communication forum for collaborative networking on sustainability issues, using a model like www.desert.org.
- Get local leadership, nonprofits and local government working together. Take a baby step to achieve something small with a collaborative effort. When successful, can use as example that collaboration works, and move into bigger things. Example: Rifle community garden.
- Start a Mesa County version of CLEER, which requires *Means – Reason – Individual Willingness*. This organization has to be transparent, easily accessed and provides information for standards on efforts, education and outreach. Someone may need to be paid in order to make changes, not just volunteers. An elected Board will oversee staff to 1) make recommendations to city commissioner, made up of elected officials and 2) get word out – newspaper reporter. A suggested name for this entity would be the *Grand Valley Sustainable Community Development Corporation* because “development” refers to *Improving what you have*, as opposed to “growth”, which is indefinite and will exhaust itself.
- Create a Regional Authority to get people to allow for funding outside of their territory.
 - a. Housing Resources – energy offices may be a good opportunity
 - b. Nonprofit working in collaboration with the government
- Use the establishment of uniform building codes that are resource efficient to forge a statewide sustainability network.
- Continue sustainability networking meetings.