
Snowmass works on green plan

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SNOWMASS VILLAGE – Local regulatory agencies, utilities, nonprofits and businesses were well-represented at the latest public meeting to work on an environmental plan for Snowmass Village. But residents were in shorter supply Tuesday.

Facilitator Michael Kinsley of the Rocky Mountain Institute said he would like to see more community participation in a town that has a reputation for being one of the least environmental municipalities in the Roaring Fork Valley.

“It would be much more encouraging to me if there were more representatives from the community here,” he said.

Most recently, a report from the Sopris Foundation stated between 61 and 68 percent of Snowmass’ homes are second homes that arguably waste energy.

Snowmass also has been criticized for taking grants from the “feebate” Renewable Energy Mitigation Program (REMP), but not paying into it.

In Aspen and Pitkin County, REMP requires homeowners who wish to build a bigger house or add energy-intensive elements, such as a heated driveway or pool, to either mitigate with on-site renewable energy projects or pay into a fund that grants money for renewable projects. Snowmass has no such payment requirements but has received REMP grants, most recently for \$9,000.

But Piper Foster, executive director of the Sopris Foundation, said she was inspired by Snowmass’ recent steps to develop an environmental plan.

“My impression has been that [until now] the town has abdicated from environmental policy,” she said.

She said she was also encouraged by the reaction of at least one Snowmass second-home owner to the Sopris Foundation report.

While at the meeting she was approached by Colleen Doyle, a member of the Snowmass Second-home Owners Advisory Board, who asked her to present the Sopris Foundation report to Snowmass’ second-home owners.

And Jason Haber, the town’s economic resource director who organized the meetings, noted that it can often be hard to recruit members of any town for meetings, unless the topic is a divisive one.

The meetings were organized by Snowmass Village to help with what town representatives call a “grassroots effort” on the part of several townspeople pushing for a greener Snowmass.

Recommendations from these meetings will be vetted by several town boards and eventually become a guiding document to be adopted by the Town Council, Haber said.

He also expected the recommendations would eventually translate to specific commands to town departments, programs and regulations.

At Tuesday’s meeting, members of the public brainstormed projects they would like to see, based on environmental priorities developed at previous meetings. Ideas included funding a paid environmental position with the town, exploring wetland treatment for stormwater, creating an “affordable retail” program that might mimic current affordable housing programs, marketing Snowmass Village as a “no-car-needed” destination, and providing subsidies for “blower door” tests which identify leaks in a house’s insulation.

While countless roadblocks stand between these ideas and implementation, the key now is to help residents understand the range and gravity of the benefits to environmental sustainability, Kinsley said.

Everything on the proposed list of ideas costs time and/or money he pointed out, so residents may need to be motivated to implement the changes.

But he was not convinced that the answer is always more regulation.

“If a community is able to set up a mechanism – an organization, for instance – that educates people about the

importance of their energy use and makes it relatively easy to change, that will probably be better off than most regulations,” Kinsley said.

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