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Air Quality Advisory Board

TO: Councilman Ross Cuniff, Mayor Weitkunat and Council Members

FROM: Tom Moore, Chair Air Quality Advisory Board

CC: Darin Atteberry, City Manager
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DATE: December 15, 2014

SUBJECT: Statement regarding the Climate Action Plan

At our November and December meetings, the Air Quality Advisory Board (AQAB) reviewed the on-going Climate Action planning. We voted to offer the following statement to City Council and the CAP Advisory Committee reflecting some perspectives that have emerged from several years of analyses and debate on our Board and with other Boards.

The AQAB's focus is often on the complex technical, regulatory and policy aspects of air resource management. We strive to continually improve the city's air quality and we previously have expressed support for ambitious climate action goals and actions. We believe the goals that the Council has asked the Advisory Committee to consider are consistent with the level of change that is required to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. Furthermore, the added air quality benefits of climate action now are many. One in particular, lower ground level ozone precursor emissions, is both an important health and a key economic issue because Northern Colorado is projected to be an ozone non-attainment area for the health-based air quality standards for another decade unless we radically change our behaviors.

Our review of the draft strategies and modeling outputs for the CAP leads us to conclude (preliminarily) that the emissions reduction goals are technically achievable, at an acceptable cost or potentially even a long-run economic benefit to our community.

But there is an obvious and very significant challenge to actually implementing the revised Climate Action Plan. This challenge is essentially to permanently change behaviors. The direction we take to shape our future depends as much on our willingness to act as on our science and technology. Our will is the "why and when" and science and technology are the "what and how". Our advice to council is to ensure that the Climate Action Plan has a strong focus on the "why and when" aspects of climate action rather than spending much more time on the "what and how".

In other words, many technical opportunities to reduce carbon emissions are at our fingertips now; for example, putting more electric cars on the roads, putting in more rooftop photovoltaic solar collectors and constructing more energy efficient buildings.

These are things we can and should be doing now...today. But why aren't we? Why so much inertia? It is because the overwhelming challenge we all face is not technical...it's behavioral. It is presenting persuasive reasons why a citizen or a business should act now to implement these changes, and creating a policy-environment that supports the decisions and behaviors that will turn the ambitious CAP strategies into reality.

This is the challenge for the leaders in this city...doing now what is economically feasible and necessary to ensure a positive, sustainable future; clearly stating what today's investments will yield in the coming years.

Technical solutions for emissions reduction are way out ahead of implementation actions and continue to advance. Instead of spending months debating the strategies that should go into the CAP, or arguing about whether they are "realistic" or affordable, let's focus our efforts on changing our behavior to catch up to our currently-available technologies, not the other way around.

In summary, the AQAB urges that climate action planning and implementation focus on presenting strong, supportable, convincing economic and environmental reasons why we should act now, how we can influence values and change behaviors. Among the ways to inspire people to act are to recruit broad-spectrum community leadership and emphasize economic rationale.