

Crested Butte Bans Natural Gas in New Construction — A New Statewide Trend?

Given our commitment to addressing climate change, one of my favorite email newsletters is "Big Pivots," written by Allen Best of Arvada. The mission of his non-profit is to document, understand and educate about the changes made necessary by climate change.

Among those changes is the transition from fossil-fuel heating of homes and water using natural gas and propane now that electric heat pump units are practical and affordable.

The latest Big Pivots email newsletter (which you can subscribe to at bigpivots.com) was about Crested Butte's recent decision to outlaw natural gas in new construction. Rather than rewrite what Allen wrote, here is his article with some minor edits:

Crested Butte, a one-time coal mining town, has now turned its back on natural gas. Town councilors unanimously agreed that any new building erected on the 60 vacant lots cannot be served by gas. Major remodels must be electric-ready. It's Colorado's first natural gas ban, although 80 other jurisdictions around the country have taken similar measures.

"There was a lot of talk at council about it being a bold decision, but I don't see it that way," said Crested Butte Mayor Ian Billick. "Not only is it what we need to do, but we have all the tools to do it cost effectively."

Billick arrived at Crested Butte several decades ago as a biologist at the nearby Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory. Many ex-

periments there have focused on the effects of warming temperatures on existing plants. One experiment involving year-round heat lamps specifically foretells a shift from the showy wildflowers for which Crested Butte is famous to an ecosystem dominated by sagebrush.

Temperatures continue to creep higher, but at more than 8,900 feet in elevation, Crested Butte still has chilly winters. The overnight temperature during January averages 6 below.

The takeaway here is that if Crested Butte is comfortable with the replacement technologies for natural gas, most other places in Colorado should be, too. Instead, builders are still tethering tens of thousands of homes and other new buildings each year to natural gas pipelines.

Denver and Boulder have taken steps to push alternatives. Here and there individual action has occurred. In Westminster, John Avenson in 2017 ordered his natural gas meter removed after maximizing the passive solar potential of his house. In Arvada, Norbert Klebl developed 30 homes without natural gas in a project called GEOS. In Basalt, two affordable housing complexes have been built without natural gas. An all-electric hotel is under construction in Snowmass. North Vista Highlands is slowly taking shape in Pueblo. In Fort Collins, plans have been drawn up for Montava, a 500-unit project.

We have been pivoting slowly, but the transition is accelerating.

Granted, the generation of electricity still causes atmospheric pollution. Emissions will dramatically drop by 2030, however, as Colorado's utilities close nine of today's 10 coal-burning units.

Colorado legislators in 2021 passed several laws that collectively seek to squeeze emissions from our buildings. The laws reflect the state's political makeup. Colorado may be dominated by Democrats, but it's still a purplish state. In other words, don't expect a wave of Crested Butte-type mandates such as occurred in California beginning in 2019. We walk on a different balancing beam.

Most important among Colorado's legislative squeezes is Senate Bill 21-264, which requires Colorado's four regulated natural gas utilities to incrementally reduce emissions.

The law identifies several pathways. They can, for example, help customers improve efficiency of buildings, so buildings need less gas to provide comfort. They can augment the methane obtained by drilling with methane diverted from sewage plants, feedlots and other sources. The first of their plans will be filed with state regulators in 2023. The bottom line is that the gas companies will have to adjust their business models.

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission has now set about

creating rules for evaluating clean-heat plans. In filings beginning last December, real estate agents, home builders and even some municipalities have argued that converting from natural gas will add costs. That was the same message at recent meetings in Montrose and Grand Junction. Their message was simple: Don't change.

In metro Denver's more affluent northwest suburbs, Christine Brinker of the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project reports a draft policy would give builders a choice between either all-electric or natural gas with extra energy efficiency.

Unless a way can be found to cost-effectively sequester carbon emissions, natural gas will slowly be phased out in coming decades. Ironically, the arrival of natural gas was one reason that coal mining ended in Crested Butte in 1952 after a seven-decade run.

EV Roundup Returns Oct. 1st

Plan now to attend this semi-annual event from 2 to 5 pm on Saturday, Oct. 1st, at the Net Zero Store, 17695 S. Golden Road in Golden.

Register as an attendee or as someone bringing their EV at www.DriveElectricWeek.info. At this writing we already has 11 different models of EVs registered, but we're expecting 30 or more, including some electric trucks.

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The softer real estate market also makes marketing your home well more important than ever, and no brokerage provides the kind of marketing — including promotion of your home in this column and our trademark narrated video tours — that Golden Real Estate provides. Our phone numbers are below.



By JIM SMITH, Realtor®

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