

https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/committee-unveils-proposed-overhaul-of-pitkin-county-growth-regulations/article_5e05b9ec-f552-11ed-9675-b7e3638cdc10.html

Committee unveils proposed overhaul of Pitkin County growth regulations

Scott Condon, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer
May 18, 2023



The Pitkin County Community Growth Advisory Committee is advising county commissioners to limit future maximum house sizes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Jason Charme/Aspen Daily News

A special committee appointed by the Pitkin County commissioners is prepared to propose sweeping changes to growth regulations to achieve the goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building affordable housing and preserving community character.

The 26 members of the Community Growth Advisory Committee held 21 meetings over the last 10 months to produce a 71-page report. The committee voted to approve its report Wednesday night after a three-hour meeting and consideration of multiple refinements.

Committee member and former Basalt mayor Rick Stevens said the report needed to stand out for the commissioners, who are presented with reams of agenda, reports and documents.

“This one is going to be the (outline) for what goes on for the next 10, 20 years here,” Stevens said.



Michael Miracle and Mona Newton, co-chairs of the Pitkin County Community Growth Advisory Committee conduct a meeting Wednesday night. The committee unanimously approved recommendations on land use regulation changes.

Scott Condon/Aspen Daily News

The report will be presented to a joint meeting of the commissioners and county planning and zoning commission on June 6 in a meeting open to the public. Multiple meetings are anticipated while the county boards consider implementing the proposals.

A house-size cap was one of the “thorniest” issues the committee debated, according to an introduction to the report by co-chairs Michael Miracle and Mona Newton. The committee ultimately decided to recommend a reduction of the maximum allowable house size from the current 15,000 square feet to 9,250 square feet in the urban growth boundary and 8,750 square feet in more rural parts of the county. Caveats exist, such as more restrictive limits set by caucuses. The report advised to exempt houses 5,750 square feet and smaller from the growth management system, as they are now.

The report makes the case that the largest homes are the most energy intensive. Homes larger than 5,750 square feet comprised only 15% of the single-family home inventory in unincorporated Pitkin County in 2019 but emissions from large-home energy use accounted for 43.4% of the total residential energy use emission that year, according to a study conducted for the county that reviewed energy use data for nearly 900 homes.

“It is suggested that the higher energy use per area with large homes is primarily driven by ‘amenity loads,’” the report said. “Amenity loads are energy using amenities not seen in the average American household. Examples include humidification, intense AV + IT systems, oxygen systems, wine storage, very tight thermal control, use of in-floor heating even during the cooling season to provide ‘warm toes’, extensive air filtration systems, large cooking ranges requiring make-up air treatment, heat tape, extensive lighting systems, indoor and outdoor spas, indoor and outdoor pools, outdoor lighting, pumped and/or heated water features, water treatment systems requiring pumping, snowmelt systems, indoor fireplaces, treated make-up air for indoor fireplaces, outdoor fireplaces, outdoor heaters, extensive air filtration systems, etc. (this is not an exhaustive list).”

The house-size cap is seen as a way to help achieve the county’s goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2050. Electrification of new residential construction and remodels will be required by 2030. Committee member and former Aspen mayor Bill Stirling applauded the committee for following Crested Butte’s footsteps by advising a prohibition on natural gas hook-ups in the future.

“I think it would catch the attention of people like Crested Butte’s did,” Stirling said.

The report advised commissioners that “doing nothing is not an option.”

“If the County chooses to make no changes to its land use, building and energy codes, we will not meet our climate goals and will only see greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise as house size increases,” the report said.

On the flip side, adopting the committee's recommendations will cut potential emissions from the current maximum buildout of the residential sector three-fold compared to taking no action, the report said.

Limiting house sizes also is viewed as a possible way of offsetting factors that have transformed the upper valley economy. Large homes have created small hotels or "activity nodes" out in the country instead of in Aspen or Snowmass Village. The homes require an army of workers to maintain and serve them.

"The maintenance of large homes in unincorporated Pitkin County generated nearly 9% of total 2019 annual greenhouse gas emissions," the report said. "87% of these home maintenance emissions came from transportation, i.e. trips by people hired to manage or maintain a home.

Another major goal of the recommendations is to coax construction of more affordable housing in the rural parts of Pitkin County. Affordable housing policies that won approval Wednesday night included, "Allow larger affordable housing density within the Highway 82 corridor, if it meets (specific) parameters." Those parameters were spelled out in detail in the report. They included access to infrastructure, minimal visual impacts and close to transit.

The committee also advised the commissioners to find a permanent funding source for affordable housing programs.

The report was approved 23-0, with three members absent and a handful leaving early and giving their proxy to other members. The introduction to the report noted that no one quit the committee through the grueling process. Member after member commented Wednesday night during the final vote that they were proud of the collective effort.

The county community development department will work on clerical and editing changes through May 22 and Miracle said he wanted to make some changes to the introduction. When those edits are made, the report will be available to the public.

scott@aspendailynews.com