

Energy Matters – January 2008

by Jessie Levine

In 2007, efforts of the Carbon Coalition (www.carboncoalition.org) to bring global warming and energy conservation into the forefront of local politics did not go unnoticed by New London residents. Dr. Chester Reynolds, a retired surgeon who has lived in New London for 21 years, was inspired by an Adventures in Learning course called “Climate and Civilization” taught by Jim Moore. Dr. Reynolds championed a petitioned warrant article before the 2007 Town Meeting and New London voters responded with overwhelming approval. Similar warrant articles passed in 164 of New Hampshire’s 234 municipalities, all calling for the towns to “go on record in support of effective actions by the President and Congress to address the issue of climate change,” encouraging citizens to work for emission reductions within their communities, and asking Boards of Selectmen to appoint voluntary energy committees to recommend local steps to save energy and reduce emissions.

New London’s Energy Committee first met in July 2007 and its monthly meetings have grown to roughly ten active members (meeting minutes and information are available on the Town website at www.nl-nh.com/energy). The Committee immediately agreed that its mandate is two-pronged: 1) to make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and Budget Committee for measures that could reduce and conserve the Town’s energy and fuel consumption and save money; and 2) to educate New London citizens on energy-saving measures in the hopes of raising awareness and reducing New London’s contribution to greenhouse gases. The Committee further separated these categories into two more: low-hanging fruit and long-term goals. Importantly, the Committee also concluded that its members and the members of the community do not have to agree that there is a threat of global warming; regardless of one’s position on the subject, the reduction of energy consumption is good for the environment and for our budgets.

As this article goes to press, the Committee has already made great headway on the following projects:

- It established a popular display of reading material and other information at Tracy Library.
- It recommended an Idling Policy for Town vehicles that was passed by the New London Board of Selectmen after a public hearing on January 2, 2008.
- It is planning a Lights Out New London event on February 21, 2008, asking New London residents to pledge to eliminate their use of electricity for 1.5 hours that evening (and going outside to see the full moon and total lunar eclipse).
- It met with a representative of the Jordan Institute and plans to audit Town buildings to evaluate the need for energy-saving improvements such as insulation, windows, and lighting. Surprisingly, 48% of energy consumption (of which 30-50% is wasted) comes from buildings, while transportation and industrial sources account for only 25% each.
- It has engaged a Colby-Sawyer student who will serve as an Energy Committee intern this spring while at the same time perform her Capstone project on evaluating the potential local use of wind turbines for alternative energy production.

- Members have attended a series of training sessions, workshops, and conferences related to global warming and energy conservation.
- Members have encouraged the Planning Board to include energy consumption as a subject of critical importance in revising the Town's 10-year Master Plan; and
- Members asked the Argus Champion for the space to have this column, called "Energy Matters," which will feature a new Energy Committee member on a new subject every month.

Prior to the Energy Committee's formation, the Town of New London had already taken steps to conserve energy: it reduced the number of street lights by one-third and converted the remaining lights to high pressure sodium lamps, which are more energy efficient and cost less to operate; and it converted all Town diesel vehicles and equipment to biodiesel, joining a very small number of New Hampshire municipalities to do so.

The Energy Committee hopes these monthly columns prove to be educational, useful, and inspiring. The Energy Committee meets at the New London Town Offices on the first Monday of every month, and we invite people to participate as we work on our long-range goals.

Jessie Levine is the New London Town Administrator.