

Westport News (CT)

March 6, 2009

Section: Local

The greening of Westport continues

Frank Luongo

In Chicago, a builder who adheres to municipal standards for environmentally friendly construction is awarded a faster approval process from city agencies. The Westport Green Energy Task Force (GETF) wants the town to consider incorporating similar initiatives into its building regulations. Many towns and cities across the country are taking similar approaches to reducing their carbon footprints, **David Mann** told his fellow GETF volunteers in an informal discussion Wednesday about the goals of the committee.

During the discussion, committee members also celebrated the fact that the town has been credited with four additional solar panels under a program sponsored by the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund (CCEF), which was established by the General Assembly in 2000 to foster the development of alternative energy sources.

GETF Chairman Kimberly Lake said that the Board of Education has given the go-ahead to put the new panels on a school building. She said that there would be a meeting soon with the school business office to work on the choice of the school.

Regarding building codes, Mann described the greening effort as a "carrot and stick approach. It's effective."

Mann urged the committee to plan a survey to study the best greening practices of other municipalities.

He said that with buildings being a source, on average, of more than 30 percent of carbon emissions, it makes sense to propose building codes to promote sustainable energy efficiency.

Mann runs Greentek Consulting in Westport, a firm that promises on its Web site to "make going green easy" for residential and commercial clients.

According to Lake, the committee hopes to find a college or high school student to conduct the survey this coming spring or summer in advance of the committee making building-code recommendations to the town.

She said that Planning and Zoning Department Director Laurence Bradley has already agreed to meet and talk about the survey initiative, a possibility that Mann said would be essential for the success of the project.

GETF was successful last year in recommending what the committee has described as a "tweaking" of building-height regulations to make possible the installation of roof-flush solar panels on town buildings.

The Westport Fire Department building received the first of the solar panels from the CCEF program, and there appeared to be a consensus during the GETF discussion that Staples High School should be the next public building for the solar-panel installation.

GETF member Monique Bosch reported that Staples students, competing in the recent Green Cup Challenge, received more than a thousand energy-use surveys from a door-to-door canvass of town residents.

She said this resulted in 56 new sign-ups for the green-energy pledge to take steps to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions by one ton a year. Such pledges earn points for the town toward the solar panel awards. The total number of pledges to date is approaching 400, according to Bosch.

The building-code survey, Mann said, would find a number of different standards at work in municipal regulations, indicating, he said, that the most effective code changes try to avoid making the greening rules burdensome.

He said the new codes could be limited in application by the cost of new construction or renovation. "There's a distinction to be drawn between government building projects of one million and up and private smaller ones."

"I think that any town building should qualify for Leed-Silver or better," Mann said, referring to the leadership in energy and environmental design designation developed in 1998 by the U.S. Green Building Council, a not-for-profit coalition of more than 12,000 professional and trade organizations.

Municipal compliance with Energy Star standards have been explored by the GETF committee and Mann said that the survey would find many communities that have built those standards into their regulations.

Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy to set efficiency standards for heating and cooling systems, lighting, home electronics and office equipment.

The program offers homeowners and businesses counseling for making buildings more energy efficient and tracking the savings in costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

(c) 2009 Westport News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Media NewsGroup, Inc. by NewsBank, Inc.