

Town considers wind energy to power municipal buildings

By Dotti Farrington

The Town Council Monday harnesses the concept of wind energy to power municipal buildings, resulting in a savings of more than \$200,000 a year in electricity costs. They ratified a proposal made independently by two groups of residents in late October, and was this week formed into a mission statement by Town Administrator Bruce Keiser.

The council delegated Keiser to advertise for volunteers for a wind energy committee, send a letter to funding sources to hold a place for the town to apply for grant money, and otherwise prepare for an appointed and functioning committee before the end of January.

The approval provides for a five-member committee working with Public Works Director Steven Goslee and Town Planner Lisa Bryer.

Council President David Long hailed the concept as "an incredible idea on so many levels. I'll be so proud of Jamestown if we do it." He told the initiators of the plan for the town, "I am so glad you came forward."

Long noted that Keiser was planning to attend a wind energy seminar on Cape Cod Friday, where plans for sea-based wind turbines along Cape shores has been stalled by opponents. Long said he did not understand the questions about esthetics and other points of resistance to the wind energy program.

Councilman William Kelly said, "There is nothing more important as an example of recycling to save energy. We should move as soon as possible to investigate" its applications for the town. He expected tremendous savings if the town can build one or a few wind turbines, he said.

Council Vice President Julio DiGiando listed concerns about zoning and financing, legal and technical aspects, and a need for public relations. He nonetheless concluded, "This is an opportunity to provide the town with a 21st-century infrastructure." Last month, he said that wind energy ties in with general town goals of "going green" in terms of environmentally creative practices and saving money.

Presenting their ideas to the council a few weeks ago were residents Robert Bowen and William "Bucky" Brennan. They said they represented two unofficial groups of citizens who have been working independently for several months on gathering data about wind energy, spurred in part by reports of success of a wind device at the Portsmouth Abbey, as well as new state actions.

Bowen said a "white paper" report about the technology, with

options and possibilities, was submitted in mid-October to the town. It was intended also to be used to encourage state agency interest in Jamestown for location of a wind turbine. The report focuses on an installation, of possibly only one device, to create energy mainly for municipal buildings, according to Bowen. The report was compiled by Bowen, Mark "Brown" Beezer, John Collins, Michael Swistak, and Dennis and Mary Webster.

Brennan reported work by himself and the other residents to develop data for harnessing of wind energy for wider uses, possibly on a statewide basis. He talked about installation of two or more devices, and suggested that energy generated would be sold by the town and profits used to offset municipal energy and other costs. "We all need renewal energy. We need to be a visionary community" by taking a leadership role in area or global needs, he said.

He identified his group of residents as Don Wineberg, Peter Shutt, Clayton Carlisle, and Alan Baines. He also noted that Michael Larkin has announced his interest in wind power developments.

Keiser and Bowen referred to the state's interest in such projects and in the availability of grants of up to \$25,000 requiring a local contribution of \$5,000 to develop studies or operations. Possible sites already being tentatively considered are town-owned parcels at Taylor Point and Fort Getty.

Last June, some citizens representing the Jamestown Chamber of Commerce suggested that the town Planning Commission conduct a study of wind energy. About four years ago, the Planning Commission began talking about and watching progressive developments in the field of wind energy. The chamber representatives at the planning session earlier this year were listed as Swistak, former chamber president; current Chamber President Charles Petit, and Randy Tyson, William Munger, and Donna Kohler.

Planning Commissioner Barry Holland told the chamber group that he favored wind energy exploration, but he did not think Jamestown residents would favor wind generators, based on their opposition to proposals for various other installations.

Commissioner Michael White reported his experience when he lived in Montana, where the wind machines were very noisy. Commissioner Victor Calabretta said the devices have been improved in the past decade. The commission took no vote or formal consensus on wind energy at that time.

It was noted that Gov. Donald Carcieri in early 2006 issued a formal alternative energy policy statement, appointed a commission to identify possible locations for wind turbines, and made provisions to starting providing state grants for wind energy efforts.

Wind energy is reported to be the world's fastest growing energy source, and has been described as a clean and renewable source of energy.

It was begun in Persia almost two centuries ago, and used about 1500 years by Europeans who brought it to America early in this country's history. Early installations were known as windmills, but the current terminology focuses on wind turbines.

Turbines are built where the wind blows at least 14 miles per hour. California has been a wind turbine leader for decades, and has one of the largest wind operations, or farms, in America with more than 12,000 turbines.

One of the largest wind turbines in the world, in Hawaii, stands 20 stories high and has blades the length of a football field. A wind turbine works the opposite way a fan does. Instead of using electricity to make wind, a turbine uses wind to make electricity.

Wind energy is used to sail boats, pump water for farms or to prevent flooding, and to turn stones

to grind grains. In Jamestown, the town ordered the construction of a windmill in 1728 to grind grains and the structure on North Main Road is on the National Historic Registry.

Significant increases in energy costs have created a new emphasis on the use of wind power to generate electricity, and technological improvements have made wind power economically viable for a variety of applications.

"White Paper"

A citizens report was written by the Bowen group members, who describe themselves as six residents of various backgrounds who were inspired by local developments, and who collaborated to survey the possibilities of bringing wind power to Jamestown as a means of reducing municipal energy costs. They said they wrote the report to provide an initial resource for town leaders to help in determining if Jamestown should pursue an initiative to formally study the installation of a wind turbine on Conanicut Island.

Based on their research, a wind turbine system is a "single meter" system, which means the turbine can generate electricity for a specific location and eliminate or significantly reduce the need to purchase electricity from a local utility.

Any excess electric power can be sold back to the utility to generate revenue, the Bowen report stated. At this time it does not appear that the town could move electricity over power lines owned by the local utility, according to the report. If a wind turbine were installed at the town wastewater

treatment plant at Taylor Point, and the average wind speeds at that site could justify a turbine similar to the Portsmouth Abbey system, then the site could possibly generate one million kilowatt hours of electricity. According to town records, that site currently uses over 300,000 kilowatt hours annually, at a cost to the town budgeted this year at \$42,000. The excess production could be sold back to National Grid for about \$25,000, the Bowen group estimated.

Dimensions

The report estimated that the single wind turbine they envision would be about 241 feet tall on a base tower of 164 feet with three 77-foot blades. They compared that to the 75-foot Bayview Condo height, the 100-foot town water tower, and the 206-foot roadbed of the Newport Bridge with its 400-foot towers.

The White Paper Report concluded that "The bottom line is that if Jamestown has any interest at all in investigating the potential benefits of a municipal wind power system, then immediate efforts should be made to obtain funding for a formal feasibility study. Financial and technological resources are currently available, and Jamestown has the opportunity to be a leader in this effort. Any delay in getting organized could jeopardize the ability to receive grant monies for the study. Surveys are currently underway in Portsmouth and Bristol."

The group cautioned that the state has reported "that towns with lukewarm community support may be passed over."

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For the record

In the Nov. 7 elections, the Press said that Sen. Lincoln Chafee was defeated by incumbent Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse, which is true on a statewide level. However, Chafee won in Jamestown, taking 52.8 percent of the vote to Whitehouse's 47 percent.

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