

Town awarded green grant

Written by Meaghan Glassett

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Hanson has received a \$10,000 grant as part of the Green Communities Act.

The state requires the funds to be used to hire a consultant service from the Department of Energy Resources. The town can select one of six consulting groups to assist the community in environmental affairs. Blue Waves Strategies has been selected by Hanson.

The grant is part of the federal stimulus package and Hanson applied for it under the state's Green Communities Act, which was signed by the governor in July 2008, Town Planner Noreen O'Toole said.

"We are excited about this because it is something we would have put our own monies into from the general fund. To be awarded this service in the amount of \$10,000 is an asset," O'Toole said.

There are five criteria the state requires towns to address. The first criteria is for towns to establish an energy baseline with their vehicles and buildings. The state wants the towns to commit to reducing energy 20 percent over a five year period. Hanson has already established a baseline. The second piece is that the state would like communities to work on expediting the permit process for someone who comes in with a big project, which most likely goes before Town Meeting, O'Toole said.

"Our permitting process is pretty quick, but the state would like us to look closer at it, she said.

The town will also have to work toward procuring only fuel efficient vehicles.

"I think all towns are trying to do that because of the gas prices," O'Toole said.

The Green Communities Act also requires all new construction to minimize the life cycle cost of the facility by utilizing energy efficient, water conserving and other renewable or alternative energy technologies.

Hanson has also formed an Energy Committee, which helps put the pieces together and drives the process, Selectman Jim Armstrong said.

One of the members on the Energy Committee is from Green Hanson.

"We are thrilled that Hanson is moving forward in this area," said Green Hanson Chairman Marianne DiMascio. "The Energy Committee is a first step in saving the town money on energy costs. The \$10,000 award is a big second step that will propel us toward being a truly green town and spending less of our hard-earned 'green' on energy."

The intent of the committee is to reduce energy usage in the municipal buildings.

The town will also look at transportation. We will look at how our vehicles are used and what can be done to save energy, Armstrong said.

Ultimately, Hanson is hoping for a wind turbine to save on electricity and also installing solar panels on municipal buildings' roofs.

Part of the criteria of Green Communities is reducing energy 20 percent over a five year period. Hanson has already reduced energy in municipal buildings by 17 percent. This has been done by lighting retro fits, occupancy centers, programming thermostats to shut things off and replacing equipment, Armstrong said.

The departments have been talking to each other and coordinating more data, he added.

Two years ago the town started collecting energy bills and tracking consumables.

“A lot of the towns haven’t done that and that’s why we are ahead of them,” Armstrong said. “I think we have a big advantage over a lot of other towns.”

Hanson is one of the 100 towns statewide that has been awarded this grant.

All the work Hanson has done to save energy has been done by volunteers and now we have the opportunity to bring in some professionals to help in the process, he said.

“We are ahead of the curve, but we need to do more. There is a lot more we can do,” Armstrong said.

The community is getting into becoming green not only because they want to, but because they have to, and because of what is happening in the energy market; we can’t depend on foreign oil, he said.