



# ENERGIZING

## IDEAS:

## The Emergence of Local Energy Committees

By Roger Stephenson

In 1963, through legislation signed into law by then Governor John King, the State of New Hampshire gave towns the right to form conservation commissions. Quite a contrast with 2007, when at 164 Town Meetings, the people of New Hampshire expressed that local people had global obligations and called for the establishment of local energy committees. The fact that 93 local energy committees exist today—one year later—is remarkable, and testament to the influence of grassroots action, neighbor talking to neighbor.

Three hundred volunteers in the Carbon Coalition (New Hampshire Citizens for Responsible Energy Policy) brought the issue of climate change and local energy committees to Town Meeting in 2007. Within 18 months, large handfuls of towns are picking away at local solutions that make sense; some towns are really taking the bull by the horns, and a few are making the effort to conduct careful inventories of where, when and how their municipalities are using energy.

The bottom-up grassroots growth of local energy committees, however strong and well-received, does mean that committees are at vastly different stages of development. Additionally, committee members are confronted with so many options that they often do not know where to start.

In an effort to help communities along, the Carbon Coalition steering committee formed the Local Energy Committee Working Group to focus outreach and education efforts in ways that serve local energy committees region by region. Workshops for local energy committees are ongoing; two

Web sites and an on-line handbook for New Hampshire energy committees provide tools and examples on how to get started. The following stories suggest that early-acting towns are taking advantage of existing resources and technical assistance—and are beginning to make a difference. There is a lot going on, and resources exist to help local people get things done.

### Lincoln Reaches Out

According to former Lincoln Town Manager Ted Sutton, the New Hampshire Climate Change Resolution failed in Lincoln because a small but vocal group of Lincoln citizens just “didn’t want to get in bed with government,” and successfully opposed the passage of the resolution at town meeting in 2007.

Despite seeing the resolution fail, Sutton felt strongly enough that an energy committee made sense for the common good of the Lincoln community and, after securing approval from the selectmen, got busy putting a “go-to” group together. Sutton says his secret is “to find and attract leaders to a committee who insist on results.”

The Lincoln group’s first meeting was in February 2008 and attracted a variety of attendees from developers and ski area operators to involved townspeople and merchants. The committee, now called the Lincoln-Woodstock Energy and Water Conservation Committee, adopted a mission statement one month later and, in the process, invited neighboring Woodstock to consider joining and forming a joint committee to represent both towns.

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It is the mission of the Lincoln-Woodstock Energy and Water Conservation Committee to: (1) determine local actions the towns can take to save energy and reduce emissions; (2) establish guidelines to decrease energy use and to supply energy needs using sustainable resources; (3) educate the communities on energy use and using sustainable resources; (4) implement best practices in municipal government; and (5) promote these practices with residents, community organizations and businesses.

The New Hampshire Electric Cooperative (NHEC) proved to be an early and important resource to the Lincoln committee, advising the town to conduct an audit of town facilities to look at lighting, heating and insulation. Once completed, the audit of all town-owned facilities revealed that improvements could be made in almost every building, especially in the newly purchased community center in which the committee was advised that the insulation needed to be upgraded from R-10 to R-60.

The town has received a number of grants, including one for distribution units for heating, replacing an old boiler that fired up even in the summer just to heat the water. The replacement system will operate on demand depending on the ambient temperatures. Another grant will fund an engineer to analyze the energy use of all the water and sewer electric pumps; NHEC will help the town replace units at a sewer pumping station and provide real-dollar rebates to the town based upon the energy saved under the new system.

The Town of Lincoln is also on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Energy Challenge roster. The Community



Hancock Energy Advisory Team members (left to right) Selectman John Jordan, Nancy Gamble and Road Agent Kurt Grasset pose alongside the solar panel installed on the town fire station. Photo courtesy the Hancock Energy Advisory Team.

Energy Challenge is an opportunity for municipalities across New England to identify simple and cost-effective measures that increase energy efficiency and renewable energy use while reducing air pollution and saving money.

“One of the most exciting things is involving others in the community,” explained Sutton, who feels that the energy committee has brought new enthusiasm to a program first developed by the Lin-Wood Chapter of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). FBLA students have recently teamed up with the local Rotary, the Lincoln-Woodstock Chamber of Commerce, NHEC and the Lincoln-Woodstock Energy and Water Conservation Committee (Linwood Public School senior Samantha Berreondo attends the energy committee meetings). The self-described cooperative community service project, called the “Brighter Way to Save” program, offers money-saving options to individuals and businesses in the community. Together the groups distribute compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) at very low cost. According to FBLA advisor Connie Ward at Linwood Public

School, the response from people in Lincoln and Woodstock was so favorable that FBLA will repeat the project. “The toughest part was designing the logo and putting together the letter. FBLA students were responsible for both,” said Ward.

As it happens, Ted Sutton has recently retired as Lincoln’s Town Manager. He has many successes to look back on, and perhaps starting the local energy committee will someday be seen as one of his legacy achievements. As he says often, the cheapest and greenest energy available happens to be the energy we never use. It is safe to say that Lincoln’s tax dollars are already being directed to better use; to play on Ted’s words, the best tax dollar on the table is the tax dollar that’s never spent.

### Rye Students ‘Energize’ the Community

The Rye Energy Committee was appointed in July of 2007 with three charter members, Jaci Grote, Steve White and Mimi White. They soon outlined an outreach campaign that included the creation of an energy Web site and an education campaign which in the first eight months

included book discussions, lectures and a film series that together attracted more than 120 people. Thereafter, as new members joined the committee efforts began to launch an energy audit of the town buildings and a collaborative effort with the schools as a way to educate and involve Rye residents. Members concluded that a conservation campaign involving kids was important. "After all, we're really doing this for them," said committee member Lucy Neimann. And all felt that children might prove to be the best messengers—and most fun competitors—for the committee's conservation recommendations.

This past spring, the Rye Energy Committee and the Rye Parent Teacher Association (PTA) started a town-wide Carbon Challenge Competition at the elementary and junior high schools. The committee and PTA kicked off the challenge with presentations about the Carbon Challenge to the students at both schools. Students in a seventh-grade science class

prepared a podcast that presented why carbon was of concern and solutions people could embrace to reduce their carbon emissions. (Listen to the podcast at <http://www.ryejrhigh.org/adams/energypodcasts.htm>.)

The competition involved two stages: (1) sending parents to a presentation focused on reducing residential greenhouse gas emissions (about 70 people attended the presentation, exceeding committee expectations); and (2) taking the New Hampshire Carbon Challenge (consisting of a series of steps in the home to reduce annual household carbon dioxide emissions by 10,000 pounds) with their family and completing the challenge within 30 days.

The Rye Energy Committee offered assistance at the library for families who wanted help with the Carbon Challenge online greenhouse gas emissions calculator.

The Rye Carbon Challenge Competition concluded on April 22, Earth

Day. In one month 64 families took the challenge, just under the committee's goal of 5 percent of the Rye population. "I'm still encouraged," said Lucy Neiman, "and have gotten good reactions from some people I did not expect."

According to the committee's Web site, "If every household in Rye took the Carbon Challenge, we'd keep 27 million pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> per year out of the atmosphere. We can make a difference!" Indeed, as fuel prices rise, taking the challenge will offer serious solutions for family budgets, too.

### Cool Monadnock— A Regional Approach

In southwestern New Hampshire, 32 of the 36 towns within the district served by the Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) passed the 2007 resolution on climate change. Many of these towns have formed or are in the process of forming local energy committees in order to take action and are organized under the name "Cool Monadnock" ([www.coolmonadnock.org](http://www.coolmonadnock.org)).

The goal is for each town to have an energy committee formed, an inventory completed and a plan implemented to reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions by the end of 2008. In this model of regional, multi-town climate action planning, a task force of representatives from each community has been formed.

Tim Murphy, executive director of the SWRPC, is attentive to the differences among communities. "How towns are addressing energy use is still presenting itself in many ways. For some towns we can help interested people understand why it is in their town's interest to form an energy committee; for those towns underway we can provide advice with their energy plan and even employ the capital improvement



Rye Elementary School students (left) Shelby Ward and (right) Marissa Neiman, with assistance of (center) Aubrey Ward, empty the daily collection of lunch scraps into the school compost bin. The Rye Energy Committee and school teachers wrote a grant to the Rye Education Foundation, which funded the purchase of the compost bin. Students are learning the science of composting and calculating their carbon reductions. The resulting compost will be used in school gardens, which next year may include a vegetable garden that will contribute to nutrition education and provide supply for the school cafeteria.

program (CIP) process to help implement their plans.”

Many of these communities have already begun to take action with educational initiatives or actual equipment and retrofits.

To keep residents informed, Fitzwilliam includes articles on energy issues in the town newsletter, while the Marlborough Energy Committee has provided local teachers with a workbook, *Journey for the Planet*, to be integrated into the classroom. Keene and Walpole have held Energy Fairs to provide educational information and distribute free CFLs. “Education does take time” said Carole Beckwith of Fitzwilliam, “but we think it will be well received.”

Many towns have enacted measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Marlborough, Hancock, Temple, Sharon, Peterborough and Keene have changed lights to CFLs in order to save taxpayer money through reduced maintenance costs and lower electricity bills. Frankestown has begun to use a waste oil furnace to heat the town garage and is investigating geothermal to heat the public library. Peterborough installed a wood pellet boiler in the public library to reduce fossil fuel usage and adopted a green purchasing policy. Marlborough has begun to use biodiesel fuel in the town’s heavy equipment. Walpole and Temple have audited and are in the process of auditing municipal buildings to identify energy efficient upgrades. Many other towns, such as Marlborough, are proposing to conduct comprehensive energy audits.

Under the leadership of the town road agent, Kurt Grassett, Hancock has installed programmable thermostats and CFLs in town buildings, replaced doors on the town garage with passive solar, installed ceiling fans in the

*In this model of regional, multi-town climate action planning, a task force of representatives from each community has been formed.*

fire station to push hot air down and plugged in a solar array on the fire station roof. After conducting an energy audit, town energy committee members were very pleased to see that these changes had been working, saving the town both energy and money. Committee member Nancy Gamble noted: “It was very helpful to tell the selectmen, ‘Here’s the proof—we are really making a difference, let’s do more.’”

Gamble said that their committee has worked closely with the town selectmen, who have been very receptive of the committee’s suggestions. Hancock is now also a member of the EPA Community Energy Challenge. From the energy audit, the Hancock Energy Committee has identified opportunities to save energy in the town office building and plans on monitoring its energy use in the coming months. “We have really talented and motivated people on our committee,” said Gamble. “I am thrilled that Cool Monadnock has happened. It’s a great initiative and has helped towns feel more empowered in their efforts.” The local committee is beginning to explore ways to help residents reduce energy use in their homes.

### **Momentum Is Building**

Exploration is the name of the game. Bethlehem resident David Van Houghton recalls that his town’s committee is one year old “and we seem to have 15 projects we’re still focusing on.” Kay Doherty in Lancaster expressed a similar sentiment in a recent article in the Coos County Democrat, “When the [Lancaster] group first formed [just after town meeting] they realized the issues of energy consumption and conservation were so immense that they were unsure of where to start.” Today, the Lancaster

committee is working with the Town Manager to audit the town’s energy consumption. And in May, the Coos County Economic Action Plan Steering Committee, comprised of area business, college, non-governmental organization (NGO) and other community leaders, agreed that supporting the development of local energy committees was priority number one of four high-priority energy action strategies.

Growing pains notwithstanding, the timing certainly seems right for the Granite State, as evidenced by the five hundred people that showed up at the door of the April Ammonoosic Energy Fair organized by the Bethlehem, Franconia and Littleton energy committees. As this article goes to press, the Carbon Coalition’s Local Energy Committee Working Group is enlisting key people to join a statewide advisory board in order to inform themselves about local energy committee challenges and successes and to coordinate in the complicated yet growing body of technical assistance and financial tools available to citizens, towns and local governments.

The early work of the first wave of energy committees should inspire others across the state, because as results come in people will see that no one has lost money trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; indeed, as energy prices climb, municipal climate action will become synonymous with taxpayer savings.

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# Available Resources

## Small Grants for LEC Assistance

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund (NEGEF) is designed to foster grassroots environmental initiatives in New England. In its last round, NEGEF funded all New Hampshire local energy committee's (LECs) that submitted a grant application (a total of \$9,350 to Wolfeboro, Plymouth, Gilford, Walpole and Durham). The next deadline is September 15, 2008. [www.grassrootsfund.org](http://www.grassrootsfund.org).

## EPA Community Energy Challenge

The EPA's Community Energy Challenge is an opportunity for municipalities across New England to identify simple and cost-effective measures that increase energy efficiency and renewable energy use while reducing air pollution and saving money. To date 33 New Hampshire cities and towns are making use of this resource. Contact Shubhada Kambli, at 617.918.1584 or [Kambli.Shubhada@epamail.epa.gov](mailto:Kambli.Shubhada@epamail.epa.gov). <http://www.epa.gov/region1/ecolenergy/energy-challenge.html>.

## Local Tools and Technical Assistance

The Community Toolkit, the *New Hampshire Handbook on Energy Efficiency and Climate Change* (version 1) and more resources for town officials and volunteers can be found through the Local Energy Committee Working Group at the Carbon Coalition Web site. The free LEC e-Newsletter is also available for subscription. [www.carboncoalition.org](http://www.carboncoalition.org).

## New Hampshire Community Energy Project

The New Hampshire Community Energy Project is a Web site any LEC volunteer may contribute to and edit. The site is devoted to the distribution and sharing of mission statements, project examples, financing options, energy plans and the people and local energy committees in New Hampshire towns behind the work. [www.nhenergy.org](http://www.nhenergy.org).

## Cool Monadnock

Cool Monadnock is a three-year joint initiative between Clean Air-Cool Planet and Antioch New England Institute to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the Monadnock Region through local decisions and actions. Contact Christa Koehler at Clean Air-Cool Planet at 603.570.7508 or [cKoehler@cleanair-coolplanet.org](mailto:cKoehler@cleanair-coolplanet.org). [www.coolmonadnock.org](http://www.coolmonadnock.org).

## Granite State Energy Efficiency for School Buildings

Granite State Energy Efficiency (GSE2) is a new energy assessment program that analyzes the energy use of school facilities. The resulting information helps school boards and administrators define, plan for and implement facility upgrade projects that reduce use of fossil fuels, cut greenhouse gas emissions and save scarce school dollars. Money saved can be used to repay the investments made in equipment upgrades and then be steered to other needs. To find out about GSE2 for schools, as well as project development and management services that include assessment of a range of financial options and expert guidance on "green" strategies for new and existing buildings in New Hampshire, contact Kirk Stone at the Jordan Institute at 603.226.1009, ext. 206, or [kstone@nhphps.org](mailto:kstone@nhphps.org).

## Portfolio Manager

Available at EPA's Energy Star Web site, Portfolio Manager is an interactive energy management tool that allows you to track and assess energy and water consumption across your entire portfolio of buildings in a secure online environment. Portfolio Manager can help you identify under-performing buildings, verify efficiency improvements and receive EPA recognition for superior energy performance. [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov).

## Residential Greenhouse Gas Reductions

Some LECs are seeking to serve residents of their communities directly. Housed at the University of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Carbon Challenge (NHCC) can provide state residents with the information, tools and support necessary for households to reduce their residential carbon dioxide emissions by 10,000 pounds per year. Contact Julia Dundorf or Denise Blaha at 603.862.3128 or [info@nhcc.unh.edu](mailto:info@nhcc.unh.edu).



### TELL TOWN & CITY

What is your community doing to be energy conscious?  
Send your news and ideas to [townandcity@nhlgc.org](mailto:townandcity@nhlgc.org).