

Pittsford: Pursuing Clean Energy Practices

In the early spring I asked Town Councilmember Matt O'Connor to take the lead in investigating the practicality of Pittsford earning designation as a Clean Energy Community. The Clean Energy Communities program is a state effort to encourage and assist municipalities to reduce energy usage, reduce greenhouse gases and to pursue other clean energy measures. The program is administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, known as NYSERDA. We began by meeting with representatives of the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, which serves as the Clean Energy Communities coordinator for our region.

In addition to economies that can be realized through more efficient use of energy, qualification under the program can render Pittsford eligible for state grant funding for additional clean energy initiatives. To qualify, a local government must complete at least four “High Impact Actions.” Of the four that Pittsford is looking at, three represent adaptation of some long-standing practices in our operations. At the moment, we are well along on the path toward certification for each of these High Impact Actions.

The first is Energy Code Enforcement Training. This requires NYSERDA-approved training of Town code compliance officers in best practices in energy code enforcement through training, collaborative plan review and joint onsite inspections of local construction projects. Members of our staff and Councilmember O'Connor began this training recently and met with NYSERDA-approved engineers at two current construction projects in Town. Next comes two full-fledged joint onsite inspections involving our staff and the engineers. Then we qualify for certification on this item.

The second high impact practice for which we're seeking certification is Energy Benchmarking. For years, Pittsford has tracked energy usage and expense for each of our municipal buildings. Now, to attain certification in this High Impact Action, the Town Board on May 16 adopted a resolution elevating this longtime practice to a formal Town policy. This we forwarded to NYSERDA, which accepted it. Now we'll use software from the United States Environmental Protection Agency to collect the data on energy of each municipal building and make it publicly available.

The third High Impact Action we're addressing involves adopting a Unified Solar Permit and process. This is similar to permitting forms and practices already used by the Town. The difference is that it would combine a building permit application and a solar permit application into a single form, for easier processing that lowers the burden of compliance on the applicant.

The fourth item we're considering involves installing an electric vehicle charging station in the Town. This, together with attaining the other three High Impact Actions, would qualify Pittsford for certification as a Clean Energy Community. Last year I discussed with Village

Mayor Bob Corby the idea of installing an electric vehicle charging station in the village. The Town has just obtained a quote for installing such a charging station.

For purposes of the Clean Energy Communities program, Pittsford falls into the category of municipalities with population less than 40,000. So far, only one town in this category in the state has attained certification. If we're one of the first four, we qualify for state grants for other measures that can reduce the Town's use of power even further, with commensurate savings for our taxpayers.

Although attaining certification as a Clean Energy Community appears promising at the moment, we have much to learn. Yet, quite apart from the CEC program, each of the steps I've described is worth doing for its own sake. These measures can result in more efficiency by decreasing the Town's use of energy and by encouraging more energy efficiency in new construction.

We owe a great debt of thanks to our Town staff, particularly our code enforcement staff, for their participation in this project and enthusiasm for it. We actually are much further along at this point in moving toward designation as a clean energy community than I think any of us expected when we first looked into the possibility. Special thanks to Councilmember Matt O'Connor, for serving as the Town Board's point member, leading us in pursuit of this goal.

You can contact me at bsmith@townofpittsford.org or (585) 248-6220 about this or any other matter of interest to you.