

Clean Energy Certification update from Matt O'Connor, Pittsford Town Councilman and project lead on Clean Energy Community Initiative

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Pittsford advances toward “Clean Energy Community” status

In September, the Town of Pittsford installed a charging station for electric vehicles behind the Pittsford Community Library, capable of servicing two electric vehicles simultaneously.

This improvement should not come as a surprise. Promoting healthy and sustainable living has been one of our Town government’s longest-standing guiding principles. Decades before the concept of “sustainability” became mainstream, Pittsford led the way with its landmark, award-winning Greenprint Plan, adopted by the Town Board in 1996. Since then it has become a national model for community conservation. The Greenprint preserved 67% of the undeveloped farmland remaining in Pittsford at the time. It’s truly the “gift that keeps on giving” because it’s permanent, preserving large expanses of unspoiled countryside for future generations as well as our own.

The Town’s joint project with the Pittsford Village on the Active Transportation Plan, to improve opportunities to get around Pittsford on foot and by bicycle, represents a further example of the Town promoting healthy, sustainable quality of life. So does the updating of our Comprehensive Plan. Both are the work of citizen committees, experienced consultants and Town staff. Our new Community Garden, which just opened this spring, offers another example of promoting sustainability.

The new electric vehicle charging station is one part of the Town’s involvement in the State’s “Clean Energy Communities” program. Through it, the State encourages and assists municipalities in reducing energy usage, reducing greenhouse gases and in pursuing other clean energy measures. The program is administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, known as NYSERDA.

Supervisor Smith and I kicked off this project by meeting with representatives of the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, which serves as the State’s “Clean Energy Communities” coordinator for our region. To qualify as a Clean Energy Community, a municipality must accomplish four goals, from a list of qualifying goals published by the State.

The State has identified each of these goals as being a “high impact practice” to promote sustainable energy.

Those municipalities among the earlier to qualify can be eligible for grants from New York State. So we decided to start with the four goals we could accomplish in the near term. Pittsford was already far enough ahead in this area to be in a position to accomplish these goals promptly.

The first of the four qualifying goals we pursued is “Energy Code Enforcement Training.” Fulfilling this goal required NYSERDA-approved training of the Town’s code compliance officers in best practices for energy code enforcement. The process involved

training, collaborative plan review and joint onsite inspections of local construction projects with NYSERDA. The State has certified our completion of this goal.

The second qualifying goal for which the Town has received State certification is “Energy Benchmarking.” This involved adopting and implementing a Town policy for tracking energy usage and expense for each of our municipal buildings. The Town Board adopted such a policy on May 16.

The third qualifying goal, which the State just certified, has been to put into place a “Unified Solar Permitting Process.” This makes installation of solar energy systems easier and less expensive for homeowners by reducing the burden of permitting and compliance for building solar systems. In recognition of this accomplishment, the State recently awarded Pittsford a grant of \$2,500.

The fourth qualifying goal we chose – and the one that puts us over the top for obtaining “Clean Energy Community” status – is the electric vehicle charging station.

Our efforts in this area don’t stop with the minimum necessary to win designation as a “Clean Energy Community.” There’s more on the horizon.

Now that we’ve accomplished the goals we could complete in time to position Pittsford for State grant eligibility, we move on to others. These present a longer path toward completion, but they’re worth doing for their own sake and for improving the quality of life for Pittsford residents.

The Town has now begun work on a “Community Choice Aggregation” program, for providing Pittsford residents with choices for electric power from sustainable sources, at lower cost than they’re paying now.

We’ve also begun work to use town-owned land by the Thruway as a solar energy farm, to provide cheaper electricity for Pittsford residents.

A guiding principle of Pittsford’s Town Board has been preserving our Town’s character, while pioneering its future. Our Clean Energy Community initiative is just one of the ways we put that principle into practice.