

Monroe County Post – Pittsford edition – submitted for **March 22, 2018 issue**
“From the Supervisor” column
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Pittsford’s Continuing Commitment to Greener Energy

Pittsford has a long history of policy commitments that benefit our environment, from our path breaking Greenprint plan in 1996 to earning our designation by the State of New York, last year, as a Clean Energy Community. We are among the earliest municipal adopters of Clean Energy Community standards in our county. To date, only one other Town government in Monroe County has earned this designation.

Now we’re building on past achievements by investigating alternate energy sources and ecologically-friendly practices that can benefit our residents as well as the environment.

In particular, the Town has been researching a concept known as “Community Choice Aggregation” (“CCA”). The idea is that an electric power broker would negotiate a contract on behalf of multiple communities, including Pittsford, thereby leveraging the scale of purchase to obtain cheaper or greener electricity (or both) for the residents of each participating municipality. The power producer would become the default electric power supplier for everyone in Town. Households not wishing to make a change could opt out at no cost.

Because such a program would affect every household in Pittsford, the Town would not proceed without substantial public input before taking any action. In particular, the Town administration would want to be confident, before proceeding, that such a program commanded broad support from our residents. In addition, we would want to be sure that any third-party administrator chosen to administer the program could provide the Town with “turnkey” operation, providing the customer service and responsiveness our residents expect and deserve.

Right now, we are planning for a presentation by two potential CCA administrators. This would be in a public meeting, at a joint session of Pittsford’s Town and Village Boards. The purposes of these presentations would be to inform the public in detail what CCA is all about and how it would work, and secondly, to inform the judgment of the respective Town and Village Boards about who to select as administrator, if either opts to go forward with CCA.

Once details for the CCA public meeting are confirmed, we will use every practical means at our disposal to publicize it, in order to assure as substantial a public turnout as possible.

Another clean energy alternative we’ve been exploring since last year is replacing Town street light lamps with high efficiency LED bulbs. Town Councilman Matt O’Connor is working with the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council to identify our best options. We’ll need to determine the expense of undertaking such a program and the potential energy savings and cost savings. One hurdle is obtaining ownership of the street light fixtures themselves. They’re owned by Rochester Gas & Electric. We’re seeking to work with the GFL Regional Planning Council and neighboring communities to negotiate agreements with RG&E to acquire the light poles in order to convert them to LED. On the horizon is State legislation to help in acquiring the poles, and we would seek to take advantage of the New York Power Authority’s Smart Street Lighting conversion program.

During the week of March 5 I conferred with the Greece Town Supervisor about his Town's recently completed solar energy farm. Town staff is evaluating a similar project in Wayne County, at Williamson. Councilman O'Connor and I are working with Pittsford's municipal energy consultants, Power Management, with the GFL Regional Planning Council, and will be consulting with NYSERDA and one or more solar developers, to determine a parcel or parcels of town-owned land in Pittsford appropriate for such a project. We'll be looking at possible funding under the NY-Sun Initiative Program and similar programs. The Town would not be looking to place solar collectors on any of the farms whose development rights the Town purchased as part of the Greenprint Plan in 1996. However, there are parcels that the Town owns outright – the land as well as the development rights – that may be suitable.

Last summer Pittsford adopted a NYS-approved unified solar permitting process. It makes solar energy installation by homeowners easier and less expensive.

In addition, we'll be revisiting the prospects for solar installations on municipal buildings. Ideally, the goal of such installations would be to offset the energy consumption of each building, or even exceed it, thereby supplying energy to the grid at profit to the Town. Some years ago the Town, with the help of independent advisors, looked at this and concluded that the roofs of Town-owned buildings don't have the configuration or orientation to make this practical. Since then, advances in technology and changes in the market may have changed the picture.

And as to all of the above, we want to make sure that the net benefits to our residents, including payback by way of energy savings or surplus energy production, justifies any of these investments.

As Pittsford moves ahead with continuing progress on clean energy, we need to hear from you. In particular, I urge you to attend the public meeting or meetings on Community Choice Aggregation. As always, you may contact me on this or any other topic. You can stop by my office in Town Hall, call me at 248-6220 or send a message to bsmith@townofpittsford.org.