

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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How Green Is Our Valley

Green! It's the focus of pundits, politicians and professors these days. We all talk about adopting lifestyles that reduce the use of energy, particularly that energy generated by oil and gas. Longmeadow is on board with the issue, and Roger Wojcik of our Renewable Energy Task Force met with me recently to talk about efforts to promote energy efficiency.

The task force was created by the Select Board to find ways the town can use renewable energy, and it's interesting to note that they soon discovered conservation held as much or more promise than the use of renewables.

Our town begins this new effort with significant conservation achievements in place through our recycling program. Longmeadow has become a leader in the region by limiting pickup of non-recyclable rubbish while taking any amount of recycled paper, metal and plastic. Our efforts reduce the volume of trash to be incinerated while at the same time supplying new materials for re-use in manufacturing.

This is what the task force is doing and considering for the future.

Windmills are the latest fad for energy efficiency, so the committee immediately thought about a demonstration wind turbine project. But we will not have the tall objects whirling over the town. Although you may feel buffeted by March winds, a statewide environmental analysis determined that the lower Pioneer Valley is not windy enough to justify the cost of windmills.

Solar generation is another story. The committee is working on a demonstration project of photovoltaic cells on a school roof. Longmeadow High School students have been recruited to evaluate the project, which could provide enough energy to heat the school pool. Government grants would be sought to make the installation financially feasible. The group considered using geothermal heat, drawn from underground water, but rejected the idea because of its long cost recovery schedule.

Roger suggested that I install my own demonstration project since my roof with its long southern slope is suited to such installation. But I'll have to think hard about that. As an early supporter of solar water heat, I have already had solar panels on the roof, accompanied by a large water tank in the basement. Everything was fine until the tank sprang a leak, turning the entire basement into a swimming pool!

The task force is now working with a consultant to find ways to reduce municipal energy usage, and his expertise is already yielding benefits. By changing our traffic lights to more energy-efficient models, we will save on electricity. Watch for the red and green lights to switch over to the new dot-style fixtures (yellow lights can remain in place because they aren't used as much).

The same consultant is working on a proposal to make streetlights more efficient by installing new bulbs. Before the bulbs can be replaced, Longmeadow must first purchase the whole lighting system from its owner, WMECO. The transfer itself will yield savings in rental and overhead charges. The consultant believes that the entire operation will yield such significant savings to the town that the initial costs will be recovered quickly.

The town is working to undertake green initiatives. How about us? Are we willing to move this effort into our own lives? If you are working to make your own home work more efficiently, please share your ideas by contacting our Task Force or, better yet, by writing to the *Longmeadow News* about your work. Let's see what we can accomplish together!

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