

Is there wind in Hingham's future?

This column is being initiated and coordinated by the Hingham League of Women Voters, as a public service, to inform the local townspeople of a variety of issues and constructive actions that may be taken to address various environmental concerns.

Kathleen McKenna contributed the following article from the coalition known as REACH (Responsible Energy Alternatives Coalition of Hingham). REACH is a group of citizens concerned about the future and committed to bringing wind energy to Hingham.

Wind turbines spinning in the breeze have become an increasingly common sight. Locally, turbines can be seen at: Hull; the IBEW building off the Southeast Expressway and, the Massachusetts Maritime Academy on the Cape. Other local towns currently exploring wind-energy options include: Quincy; Scituate; Plymouth; Marshfield; and, Cohasset. In addition, Responsible Energy Alternatives Coalition of Hingham (REACH) is helping Hingham residents explore wind-energy options.

Five or so years ago, Pat Granahan, a former commissioner of the Hingham Municipal Light Board and a longtime environmentalist, decided it was high time to bring wind energy to Hingham.

She assembled the members of REACH – a committee of like-minded Hinghamites she'd established years earlier – and they got to work.

“It was obvious even then that wind power is indeed cost-effective and energy-efficient,” Granahan said. “It's the perfect win-win.”

The turbines, which eventually pay for themselves, are amazingly simple devices. They create electricity in much the same way a fan creates a breeze. Wind causes the turbine blades to lift and rotate, which spins a shaft, which is connected to a generator that converts the movement into electricity.

The REACH committee studied wind and topographical maps, investigated possible sites for the proposed wind turbine, and reported their findings to the experts at the Massachusetts Technological Collaborative and at the University of Massachusetts. Based on the committee's work, UMass agreed to fund and install an anemometer, which is a critical device that measures wind speed. They only needed to know where to put it.

But then, due to red tape and a lack of support – the project ground to a halt.

As time passed, however, several things happened to make wind energy more appealing. First, last year's hit documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," caused people to understand and appreciate the economic and environmental benefits of renewable energy. Second, skyrocketing fuel prices and a war effort abroad made people question our heavy reliance

on foreign oil.

Locally, the emergence of wind energy in towns such as Hull - whose two turbines now create 13 percent of the town's energy and significantly reduces the electric bills - caused many people to question why Hingham is not using wind energy. With this heightened awareness and enthusiasm, Granahan was inspired to take up the wind project again.

She signed up new REACH members, gathered her notes, checked in with her contacts at UMass, and is leading the charge once again to bring wind energy to Hingham.

The REACH committee now meets weekly to share information and pinpoint the perfect site for Hingham's first wind turbine. Possible locations include the town landfill and Pine Hills.

Among REACH's new members are: Clayton Handleman, president of the solar energy company Heliotronics and director of the Solar Energy Business Association of New England; Carol Valentine, head liaison of Sustainable Hingham (a branch of Sustainable South Shore); and Pam Harty, appointee to Hingham's new Green Energy Action Committee.

In addition to researching potential sites for a turbine, the committee is gathering signatures in support of home-grown power. More than 500 Hinghamites have already voiced their support by signing petitions at the landfill.

The visual impact of windmills is minor, Granahan said, compared with the effects of global warming.

She also pointed out that wind energy has been the world's fastest-growing energy source since 1990. It's also big business. The wind-energy industry in Denmark alone employs 20,000 people and brings in \$3.4 billion.

Recently, REACH met with the Board of the Hingham Municipal Light Plant to present potential sites and top-line economics of a municipally-owned wind turbine. After several meetings, the Board agreed to earmark funds to test the wind resources within the town with a temporary structure known as a meteorological or 'met' tower.

Call 781-925-1090 for more information about Hingham REACH and wind energy.

The league welcomes input and information on any issues of "Green Concern" and invites you to contact us through e-mail at greencorner@hingham.ma.lwvnet.org. For membership information go to www.hingham.ma.lwvnet.org.