

Windham Renewable Energy Committee Set to Move Ahead

by Barbara O'Brien

A committee formed with Windham School Board approval last May is looking for permission to move forward with a study of alternative forms of energy for the high school, now in the final stages of construction off London Bridge Road.

Committee chairman Alan Carpenter met with school board members during their Tuesday, October 7, meeting to report on the progress made by WIRE (Windham Initiative for Renewable Energy) during the past five months of its existence.

The WIRE committee was formed following an initiative last year by Windham Middle School student David Hutchins, in which he presented information to the school board regarding possible construction of wind turbines at the hilltop site of Windham High School.

Carpenter, a former Windham selectman, told school board members the mission of WIRE is to inspire citizens and educate students about renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power. Carpenter said committee members already have looked into potential partnerships with corporate and higher education entities.

As for ultimate goals, Carpenter said, they are educational, as well as being a symbolic gesture. The purpose is to reduce the carbon footprint and enhance energy independence, he said.

In conducting research, Carpenter said, committee members have been doing almost everything electronically, thereby reducing use of paper.

One of the committee's largest undertakings is the development of its Website – completed, but not yet operational – as committee members await school board approval.

Carpenter said the committee has contacted seven companies regarding analysis of the high school site for wind turbine suitability but is a long way from having the money to have the job done. In hopes of raising that money, or a portion of it, WIRE has partnered with the local non-profit organization known as Windham Endowment for Community Advancement. Tax-deductible donations may be made to the endowment and earmarked for the renewable energy project.

School board member Beverly Donovan said she needs additional information on how the process would work administratively regarding fund raising and setting aside money for specific projects. She asked that the proposal be reviewed by school district counsel, Gordon Graham.

Superintendent Frank Bass said that WIRE, originally approved by the school board, means the board continues to have legal supervision over all committee activities and would have the final say in such matters. The school board, superintendent and committee would work together to plan a path for the future, Bass said.

Carpenter emphasized that WIRE is “not a one-project event” and he foresees the committee going forward into the future.

School board Chairman Barbara Coish said plans will be made to hold a joint workshop with WIRE in which an in-depth discussion can be conducted, so the committee can move forward with its concepts.