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Windham High may get its wind turbine

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WINDHAM — A privately funded wind turbine for Windham High School is gaining momentum. It promises to generate excitement and opportunity for students.

Project organizers, energized by a recent offer of a \$20,000 match donation, hope to reach a \$60,000 goal this year and build the turbine, its array of solar panels and a weather monitoring station by next spring or sooner.

The project has valuable applications for science, math and geology classes at the school, said Ken Relihan, a curriculum consultant with the state Department of Education.

Since alternative energy is such a growing field, students with hands-on experience will gain a valuable stepping stone for internships and college programs.

"It opens up a lot of areas — not one," he said.

New Windham High School teacher Pat Kalpo already is thinking about ways to incorporate the turbine into his physics class. Students are thinking about the possibilities the turbine offers, as too.

Windham sophomore Josh Hebert is part of the Windham Initiative for Renewable Energy effort. Late last school year, he began organizing a committee of students interested in renewable energy.

Superintendent Frank Bass said the project will inspire students to get involved in solving one of the world's greatest challenges — creating renewable energy for its billions of inhabitants.

"It creates an ethos within the building that we are concerned about our energy and where it comes from," Bass said.

WIRE president Alan Carpenter said the group will meet in the coming weeks with the district facilities manager to select a site for the turbine.

The school sits on a hill, so any location would work, Carpenter said.

"Boy, does the wind blow," he said.

The deciding factor for the site will be finding the best spot for connecting the turbine to the high school building.

WIRE member Carlo DiPersio, who has three children, said the turbine will help students explore career opportunities.

"I'm excited because it gives them an opportunity to see if this is what they want to do for a career," he said.

The privately funded project has evolved into primarily an education tool since it was introduced two years ago.

Originally, the WIRE group wanted to build a large wind turbine to offset energy costs at the school.

Such a turbine would cost around \$500,000 — too much — so WIRE organizers scaled back the size and cost of the project, Carpenter said.

The \$60,000 project they set their sights on includes a wind turbine 50 to 80 feet high with blades between 10 and 20 feet in diameter, he said.

WIRE had raised \$20,000 before the match donation, and has raised \$7,000 (or \$14,000 with the match) after the donation. That leaves the group about \$13,000 (\$26,000 with the match) short of its goal.

The match offer will stand until at least the end of September, Carpenter said.

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