

Grant Could Give WIRE Project Major Boost

by Barbara O'Brien

The competition might be heated, but members of the nonprofit Windham organization dubbed "WIRE" believe they have a chance to be awarded a significant chunk of the \$1 million grant being put up by the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission (NHUPC).

Alan Carpenter, founder of "WIRE," an acronym for Windham Initiative for Renewable Energy, met with School Board members during their May 3 meeting, telling them he had only recently learned of the money being offered by the Public Utilities Commission. "WIRE" could be eligible for as much as \$500,000, Carpenter said. "We have no money in hand, yet, but we have applied for the grant," he added.

"WIRE" was formed for the purpose of promoting alternative energy and providing hands-on learning opportunities for the students at Windham High School. The goal of WIRE is to create a solar and wind energy installation, as well as a weather monitoring station, that together will serve as a testing and learning platform.

"WIRE" is being assisted by the Windham Endowment for Community Advancement, using its Capital Campaign 2010 to provide WIRE with a fundraising arm. That affiliation has allowed "WIRE" to meet its goal of raising sufficient funds to implement phase one of the project. Together, the Endowment for Community Advancement and "WIRE" sought out ReVision Energy to assist with solar need specifications for this particular grant. ReVision Energy has offices in Portland, ME, and Exeter.

The Endowment's Board of Directors voted to "partner" with "WIRE" back in 2008, when "WIRE" first became an ad hoc committee of the Windham School Board. "As this project would not receive any financial support from the school district in the way of tax dollars, 100 percent of the project costs needed to be raised privately," Windham Endowment spokesperson Diane Carpenter explained.

By working with the Endowment, "WIRE" received expertise in the area of marketing, fundraising, and grant writing. The Endowment incorporated "WIRE's" Alpha Project into its own Capital Campaign for Windham High School and with the hugely successful Stephen O. Anderson matching grant, was able to reach 100 percent of the fundraising goal. "'WIRE' now has the funds it needs to complete Phase I [the Alpha Project]," Diane Carpenter said.

The PUC Grant for \$500,000 would allow "WIRE" to implement Phase II of its work and bring real financial savings to Windham High School through the reduction of utility costs, Diane Carpenter noted. In the grant application, Windham High School is requesting the grant to be used for the installation of a 101-kilowatt solar electric array on both its roof and also on a pole mount, in order to maximize both

efficiency and visibility. The technology employed is known as photovoltaics. The system proposed would consist of 436 230-watt panels. The primary 101-kilowatt photovoltaic array would be a ballasted roof-mounted system. Output control, monitoring, and inversion equipment would be wall-mounted in a third-floor mechanical room with roof access. Instrumentation would also include a remote monitoring "web box" that would provide access to real-time system performance data to anyone with a web-enabled device.

As the high school is situated on a vast hilltop clearing with ample year-round solar exposure, it is said to be the perfect location for the proposed system. If built as proposed, Alan Carpenter said, it would offset about 137,000 pounds of carbon on an annual basis.

Alan Carpenter said that the grant process will take about two or three months to finalize. He was uncertain, however, of when an answer would be received, but the decision could be learned by late July. "If we get this grant, the scope of this project will totally change," Alan Carpenter said. School Superintendent Frank Bass said he was unsure of how much competition there is for the million dollars in grant money statewide.

School Board members expressed their appreciation to the members of "WIRE" and the Windham Endowment for Community Advancement for their efforts. "Getting this grant could be a real game-changer," School Board Chairman Ed Gallagher said. "But win, lose, or draw, there has been a terrific amount of work done by the grant applicants."