

Green Team devises renewable energy goal metric

Commissioners question particulars of baseline, seeking help to meet goal

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TRAVERSE CITY — City leaders now have a way to measure progress in achieving Traverse City's goal of powering all government operations with renewable energy by 2020.

City commissioners discussed a metric proposed by the Green Team on Monday. The board of commissioners, staff and outside experts established a baseline of how many kilowatt-hours city-controlled meters logged in 2016 — 4,559,607 in all. They also determined how to count up and down toward the 100 percent goal as the city uses more or less energy, and adds more renewable energy to its portfolio. Nonprofits like SEEDS will help the city identify energy efficiency projects as a way to help meet the goal, city Public Utilities Director Art Krueger said.

"They're coming up with the most beneficial projects that we can do," he said.

City leaders in July voted to buy the output from Heritage Sustainable Energy's one-megawatt solar array on M-72 at a slightly higher cost, as previously reported. The array's output should push the city to 21 percent of its goal from 10.

Werner also suggested asking Traverse City Light & Power to recommend another outside group to help the city achieve energy efficiency, which commissioner Amy Shamroe seconded. Shamroe echoed a concern commissioner Richard Lewis raised about the baseline for city power consumption. The wastewater treatment plant is a major energy consumer — it used 5,164,804 kilowatt-hours of electricity in 2016, according to the memo. But the Green Team's proposal seems to classify the plant's power consumption separately, despite the fact that it's a city-owned facility, albeit one run by contractor CH2M. Lewis and Shamroe wondered why it wasn't counted along with city-controlled meters.

"Even if we can't control the membranes and other aspects that are specific to the operation itself, they use lights just like every other building, and they use a lot of other things just like every other building, and I think that should be talked about," Shamroe said.