

Green Team works on Earth-friendly goals

Team seeks to measure TC's renewable energy use, consults with Ann Arbor officials on their eco-friendly efforts

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TRAVERSE CITY — Meeting a self-imposed goal of powering Traverse City's municipal operations with renewable energy by 2020 will require a yardstick of sorts to measure the city's progress.

That's one of several tasks on which the city's "Green Team" is working, said team member and SEEDS Executive Director Sarna Salzman. The 14-member advisory board is also considering a strategy to meet that goal, and invited representatives from other Michigan cities that have pursued environmentally friendly approaches since its formation in December; city commissioners created the team at the same time they adopted the renewable energy goal.

Traverse City Light & Power Executive Director Tim Arends previously told city commissioners that buying the output from Heritage Sustainable Energy's planned 1-megawatt solar array puts the city at 21 percent of its goal.

The Green Team is prepping a resolution to create a metric for measuring the city's progress in nudging that number up, Salzman said. She'd like to have a public dashboard online by 2018 that shows how far Traverse City has come. It would also show the city's progress on another goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

Measuring Traverse City's progress on its clean energy goal will require a better understanding of how much power city operations actually consume, Salzman said. The team is working to revise this benchmark, and SEEDS is shouldering the work with help from a Michigan Energy Office grant. The team also could help the city and its utility vet options to raise that number through power purchases, Salzman said. City, utility and team representatives can identify ways to save energy, but it'll take new sources of renewable power to meet the goal.

"We are strongly behind doing efficiency first, and in the field of electricity, we are only going to get so far through efficiency unless we turned off all the lights," she said. "So then after we can achieve the deepest efficiency retrofits that are reasonable to do, given the financial constraints, then we need to fill the rest of that gap in with renewable resources."

Team members heard from three Ann Arbor city employees at their latest meeting, Soyering said. They spoke about everything from the city's stormwater utility to its experiences with ostensibly "green" infrastructure.

Salzman said it's good to hear from another community that's more advanced in its pursuit of gentle-on-the-Earth policies and practices.

"I think that's one of the most exciting things we've done in some ways, is investing in that peer-to-peer exchange space," she said, adding the Michigan Municipal League's Green Communities Program helped facilitate the exchange.

Salzman said she hopes for more of this kind of dialog, especially as other villages in the region seek to advance their own clean energy goals.