

Funds eyed for future Guilford energy projects
Saturday, April 10, 2010 By Susan Misur, New Register Staff

GUILFORD — The town's Energy Task Force is hoping officials and residents will approve issuing a \$2 million bond to draw on for future energy projects in town when it's presented at a referendum, possibly this summer or next year. Glenn Weston-Murphy, chairman of the task force, said the money would be set aside and spent when there's an opportunity to repair infrastructure with energy-efficient equipment, complete other energy projects in town or apply for matching grants for such work. Weston-Murphy and task force member Sid Gale posed the idea to the Board of Selectmen at a meeting last fall and are developing a written proposal with task force members. The bond would be similar to a \$5 million land acquisition bond established about five years ago to purchase open space. "We're trying to put the town in a position to take advantage of opportunities that come along," Weston-Murphy said.

He added that if the funds are available, it will be easy to complete projects in a timely manner without having to go back to referendum. The boards of selectmen and finance would still approve any expenditures, since the task force has no authority to spend money on projects. "An example might be if in one of the schools, all the furnaces go out and need to be replaced, and perhaps a new type of arrangement would make more sense. We would have these funds available to put a more efficient system in and go from something like a conventional furnace to a cogeneration system" that saves energy, Weston-Murphy said. The money could also be used for environmentally friendly improvements recommended by a regional energy manager that Guilford and a handful of other Shoreline towns hope to hire if they are awarded a grant they applied for a few months ago, he said.

And the bond might help the town receive additional grants for such projects, since it wouldn't have to go to referendum to ask for funding. Weston-Murphy said the task force does not yet have projects lined up that will need funding, but it would more seriously research some that could be completed if the funding is approved. First Selectman Joseph Mazza said the Board of Selectmen would need to vote on the idea before sending it to the Board of Finance and then to referendum. The Energy Task Force has not yet officially requested the \$2 million bond at a Board of Selectmen meeting. Board of Finance Chairman Matthew Hoey said he's in favor of setting up such a system. "Then we'd be able to take advantage of any opportunities that come along," Hoey said. "The bond authorization for open space has been a very successful program and has been used to buy several parcels."

Stamford set to become more energy-efficient with \$1.2 million stimulus grant
Apr 9 - McClatchy-Tribune Regional News - Elizabeth Kim The Stamford Advocate, Conn.

The city is gearing up to start spending a \$1.2 million federal stimulus grant intended to improve energy efficiency. The approved projects, which will begin as early as this summer, include installing brighter streetlights, better lighting in school gyms and putting charging stations for electric vehicles in the downtown. The grant was awarded in October as part of the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Program. It was one of the few stimulus grants to be directly awarded to eligible municipalities according to an allocation formula, according to Robin Stein, the city's land use bureau chief. Each city had to provide up with a plan of how the money would be spent.

A total of \$500,000, along with \$100,000 in local funds, will be spent on installing high-efficiency streetlights that give off a brighter light and have a longer lifespan. Stamford is one of the pilot cities that are moving toward using LED (light-emitting diode) streetlights, and has charted a long-term nearly \$3 million initiative to upgrade 9,700 of its streetlights. Beginning in the fall, 1,300 of them will be retrofitted, starting on main roads such as Tresser Boulevard, Washington Boulevard, and Long Ridge and High Ridge roads. When entire

system is replaced, the city is expected to save \$416,000 a year, said Nancy Pipicelli, Stamford's energy/utility manager. The Board of Education will get \$159,000 for new lights in 13 gyms. Pipicelli said that the current lights take 10 minutes to warm up and are often left on overnight. The new technology is expected to save the city about \$45,000 a year. Another \$62,000 will go toward a new energy management system at a vehicle maintenance facility and the central firehouse, saving about \$23,000 a year.

A plan to install several electric vehicle charging stations downtown is expected to cost about \$125,000. The city is setting aside \$223,000 of the grant for a new fuel cell and engine hybrid power plant at the Government Center. That project still needs state and other approvals, Pipicelli said. On Tuesday, the Planning Board voted to approve the appropriation of the grant. The appropriation request will next go before the Board of Finance.

Pittsfield Solar project clears hurdle

Apr 7 - McClatchy-Tribune Regional News - The Berkshire Eagle, Pittsfield, Mass.

Pittsfield could soon host the region's largest solar power project, helping reduce its dependency on fossil fuels. The city's Community Development Board Tuesday night unanimously approved plans by Western Massachusetts Electric Co. to build a 1.8 megawatt facility along Silver Lake Boulevard on an eight-acre site jointly owned by WMECO and the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority. WMECO owns six acres, PEDDA the other two with an utility substation sandwiched between the two parcels. "This is a great location as it's ideal for the technology going on display," said Carl Frattini, WMECO's director of business development. The utility expects the facility will have the capacity to produce enough energy to serve 1,800 homes -- outperforming the 1,100 similar projects in New England. It is the first of six large-scale solar power facilities that WMECO intends to build. "By focusing on large projects we can lower the cost of bringing solar technology online," Frattini said.

He noted construction of the estimated \$10 million to \$12 million project could begin by May 1, if the local Zoning Board of Appeals tonight grants WMECO a special permit. While the Community Development Board wholeheartedly endorsed the proposal, it had concerns over safety and aesthetics surrounding the facility. Board member Peter Arms wanted WMECO to go beyond simply installing an eight-foot fence to keep out trespassers, noting the facility will be unmanned. "I'm concerned about security at a new project," said Arms. "Maybe consider installing a camera." The board also worried the facility would "affect the skyline" and look out-of-place in the area. WMECO officials said the solar panels will not tower above the eight-foot fence. "I hope your rendering showing the panels low to the ground is accurate," said board member Judith H. Katz.

Nevertheless, the utility noted the plantings surrounding site will not hide the solar panels, in part to avoid casting shadows over them. WMECO's large scale solar power facility would be the first entity located at the William Stanley Business Park of the Berkshires, managed by PEDDA. The city agency was formed 12 years ago to oversee the development of the 52-acre business park, which is located on the site of General Electric's former power transformer facility. According to WMECO, the solar facility is expected to contribute more than \$200,000 in annual property tax revenue to Pittsfield.

Overall, the state wants a 250 megawatts of solar installed by 2017. Under the Green Communities Act, each Massachusetts utility company may own up to 50 megawatts of solar generation, subject to approval by the state utility regulators. Meanwhile, the city is using federal economic stimulus funds to develop a smaller solar power facility at its sewage treatment plant on Holmes Road. Public Works Commissioner Bruce I. Collingwood has said that project is currently in the design phase, with construction scheduled for this summer.

Lawmakers want to power up solar projects

Apr 07 - New Haven Register, Conn.

A 2008 law that allows electric utilities in Massachusetts to get back into the generation business through solar power is spurring two new projects, including one by a subsidiary of Northeast Utilities. Now, Connecticut lawmakers are seeking to pass similar legislation, said Vickie Nardello, co-chairwoman of the General Assembly's Energy and Technology Committee. The Bay State's Green Communities Act was passed by legislators in July 2008. Over the past 1 1/2 months, projects for "solar farms" have been announced in Pittsfield and Monson, Mass. The Pittsfield project, which was announced in mid-February and will cost \$10 million to \$12 million to build, is being done by the Western Massachusetts Electric Co., a subsidiary of Northeast Utilities in Berlin, Conn. The 8-acre site could produce up to 1.8 megawatts of solar capacity, which would power nearly 1,200 homes.

Lacey Ryan, a spokeswoman for the utility, said one of the things that made the project attractive "was that it paved the way for us to get back into generation through solar." Construction of the project is expected to start this summer. Under the Green Communities Act, each Massachusetts electric utility may own up to 50 megawatts of solar generation, subject to approval by the state Department of Public Utilities. The Massachusetts regulatory agency approved WMECO to develop 6 megawatts of solar power in August. Connecticut allows its two major electric utilities, Connecticut Light & Power and The United Illuminating Co., to participate in peaking generation projects through subsidiaries, said Phil Dukes, a spokesman with the state Department of Public Utility Control. But solar projects don't meet that criterion.

So, Connecticut's response to that problem is Senate Bill 463, which includes language that would allow UI and CL&P to own solar power generation facilities "on a limited basis," Nardello said. "I think it is highly likely that it will pass both houses this time," Nardello said. However, legislation with similar provisions failed to make it out of the Senate. Nardello said representatives of UI and CL&P worked with lawmakers on the language in SB 463 that would allow utilities to develop solar projects.

Al Carbone, a UI spokesman, said the New Haven utility "wants to invest in solar projects within our territory," so that it can help the company meet state mandates and regional goals for use of renewable energy that come into play over the next two decades. Mitch Gross, a CL&P spokesman, said, "Large solar projects are not part of the utility's focus right now. Our focus is on other things, like developing a network of recharging stations for electric cars."

Ferndale schools top \$500,000 in energy savings

Apr 7 - McClatchy-Tribune Regional News - Kira Cox The Bellingham Herald, Wash.

After 26 months of energy conservation, students and staff in Ferndale School District have reached a milestone: saving more than \$503,000 in utility costs. In January 2008, the district partnered with Energy Education Inc. to cut energy use and costs. As part of the program, Tony Torretta, the district's energy educator and manager, uses energy-accounting software to track how much electricity, water, natural gas and other utilities are used in each building. The district is in a four-year agreement with the company, at a cost of about \$77,000 a year. The cost comes from the district's utility budget. If the reduction in energy usage continues, the savings should more than pay for the program, say district officials. Additional savings could be used in other areas of the district's budget.

Energy Education has worked with more than 850 school districts across the country, resulting in more than \$1.3 billion in savings over 21 years, according to the district.