

EDITORIALS

All wind is local

It won't be easy as a breeze, but it does seem possible that some Cape towns will be generating power from the wind before Cape Wind gets to spin its first big blade.

The Nantucket Sound project is hogging all the ink these days as the Cape braces for an important public hearing Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the Mattacheese Middle School on Higgins Crowell Road in Yarmouth (the doors open at 6, when sign-up sheets to speak will be available).

Meanwhile, under the radar, Cape Cod and Islands Self-Reliance, Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative held a workshop on financing municipal land-based wind projects last month. The news was good: the MTC, tapping its treasury for funds ratepayers have already ponied up through their utility bills, could provide part of the funding "wind" beneath towns' wings.

You couldn't help but be impressed as representatives of most Cape communities reported on their progress at the meeting. Tiny Truro is talking with the Cape Cod National Seashore about wind-generated power at the former North Truro Air Force base. Wellfleet has formed a study committee. Orleans has been collecting data on wind conditions with a tower at the transfer station, and is considering powering a well water treatment plant with a gift from the skies. Harwich completed its second year of data collection and is working on locating a second site.

Here in Barnstable, the town is getting ready to put a met/com (metering/communication) tower up at the sewage treatment plant

in Hyannis. Someday a full-size turbine could power not only the plant's operations but also the nearby highway division office.

At the other end of town, Cape Cod Community College is charging ahead with data-based plans for a turbine that would be at least as spectacular as the Burger King sign across Route 132.

One of the speakers at last month's meeting, Charlie Kubert, is an environmental business specialist in Chicago. He talked about funding models that are used in the midwest, and revealed how the advance of wind power is tied to federal tax credits.

"2003 saw the largest boost in wind production," he said. "The credit expired Dec. 31, 2003. In 2004, not a single unit was created. In '05, there's a rush to get projects into the ground before the end of the year" when the credit expires.

Cape and Vineyard towns who take the big step will have the support of the Cape Light Compact, according to its administrator, Maggie Downey. As a cooperative venture that's arranging a power supply contract for its member towns, the Compact has access to energy efficiency funds that are no longer controlled by NStar.

Downey said the Compact is purchasing renewable energy certificates, basically shares of "green" projects, and would consider arrangements with municipal producers.

All this is another sign of how Cape people are applying 21st century thinking to the task of preserving the timeless beauty of this unique place. We're looking forward to seeing the blades start spinning locally soon.

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