

Lakeville voters give green light to energy efficiency rules

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LAKEVILLE — The town of Lakeville is primed to become the first SouthCoast community to bear a “Green Community” designation.

The annual Town Meeting Monday night passed all six articles in near unanimous fashion to clear the way for the Lakeville Energy Advisory Committee to begin its application process to the state. The articles will allow Lakeville to increase the growth of renewable and alternative energy in town, as proposed by the Planning Board.

Another part of the process will be to begin a baseline of energy consumption in town. The town will pledge to improve that amount by 20 percent within five years.

There are 57 communities in the state, which are designated as green communities, but none in Southeastern Massachusetts. The closest communities to Lakeville designated as a “Green Community” are Easton, Hanover, Kingston and Mashpee. Those towns are reportedly saving 30-50 percent of their energy costs.

Once the designation is approved by the state, Lakeville will be able to access grant programs, which will fund projects that address energy efficiency in municipal buildings. Those grants have been in the \$125,000 to \$250,000 range and are part of a \$10 million annual pool.

The six articles that passed will create a zoning overlay of existing industrial land; establish an expedited permitting process; set standards for land-based wind energy generation; adopt an energy stretch code from the state building code; create an agreement from the town that any new vehicles, other than police and fire vehicles, must be energy efficient, and create a baseline of energy consumption.

The one piece of the “Green Community” articles that drew the lion’s share of the evening’s discussion was the adoption of the stretch code.

“In January of 2013, the basic building code will become what the stretch code is now,” said Larry Simpson, vice chairman of the Energy Advisory Committee. “You must design buildings 20 percent more efficient than the building code. Currently, most are 15 percent and this helps them close the gap a little quicker than 2013.

“In Massachusetts, these new measures will add \$3,000 to the cost of an average home of 2,700 square feet and that will be recouped by energy savings within four years. If you go to sell an ‘energy star’ home, it will be worth more by about 8 percent.”

The Energy Advisory Committee was charged by the Board of Selectmen “to help educate the town of Lakeville on clean energy options and measures that can be implemented to reduce energy use, conserve resources and reduce emissions; to assist in the development of cost effective projects on municipal facilities; to reduce energy and resources use and develop renewable energy resources; and to promote awareness of new technologies and their potential impact on energy use and resource conservation.”

The remainder of the Town Meeting warrant went quickly, including Article 2, which spent the bulk of the town's \$20,248,152 fiscal 2012 budget.

A School Department article was passed without debate. It will be up to the regional schools to accommodate the Lakeville students that the Board of Selectmen ordered sent to the George R. Austin Intermediate School last week. The board recommended that the fourth grade be transferred out of an overcrowded Assawompset Elementary School and return it to the underutilized GRAIS.

That decision, however, rests with the joint school committees.