



## Alternative-energy ideas bloom in mid-Hudson's communities

Local officials, businesses see positives in going green

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Jim Taylor of Taylor Biomass in Montgomery discusses alternative-energy projects with area officials in 2008.

Times Herald-Record/JEFF GOULDING

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### By John Sullivan

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When Supervisor John Coutant and his Town of Esopus board decided in 2008 to build a solar farm to power a new 18,000 square-foot green Town Hall building, they were ready to go all the way.

"When we started, we wanted to produce 100 percent of our electricity," he said.

Back then, the idea of generating enough energy for a municipal facility of that size was revolutionary for Hudson Valley towns. Nowadays, however, it doesn't seem nearly enough.

"I honestly want to get rid of the electric bill for this building and for any other building in this town," Coutant said.

Communities like Esopus are leading the way in what has become a reinvigorated discussion about the possibility of transforming the Hudson Valley with renewable energy.

The talks, participants say, have been triggered by fears of energy vulnerability from events such as the crisis in the Middle East, rising oil prices, and most importantly, the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima Daiichi, Japan.

"There is an opportunity with the dawning realization that you don't gamble with what you can't afford to lose," said Tom Kacandes, a noted expert on renewable energy in the region, as well as a presenter at some of the recent gatherings on the topic of alternatives to nuclear power.

"Right now, we're gambling with Indian Point, and the Japanese are saying they're not going to do it anymore."

### A look into the future

Just what would an alternative energy future look like in this area?

Based on the available technologies and community pilot projects at work, it might be one in which homeowners retrofit their homes to be super energy efficient, powered by energy

### communities work to curtail energy usage

Much of the energy we need to overcome an energy shortage will come in the form of energy not used, otherwise known as energy efficiency.

The energy efficiency market hit a major snag last year, when the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which administrates Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac housing loans, pulled the plug on the Property Assessed Clean Energy program, which allows payments for alternative energy or energy efficiency improvements through property tax assessments.

Despite the setback, Hudson Valley communities have been barreling ahead with their own plans to drive down energy use. Those efforts include a "10 Percent Challenge," encouraging Town of Warwick residents to reduce energy usage in a year; and "Energize Warwick," a

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drawn from solar, geothermal, wind, and even hydro energy from creeks or water or wastewater treatment plants.

Individuals with electric vehicles would be able to power them at several charging stations throughout town, and folks would either own devices to turn appliances on and off remotely, or pay a service to do it for them. It would be a world in which power from the grid would be increasingly fed by renewable energy, including the biomass plant in Montgomery, which would transform garbage from homes and businesses into a gas that also could be used to power new alternative vehicles, as well.

Significant obstacles to this future exist, to be sure. A lack of serious debate in Washington D.C. about an alternative energy policy, a shortage of long-term support for the development of alternative energy, and a floundering economy all create drags on the shift toward the so-called "green energy" economy, proponents of the movement said.

"The public has to hold elected officials accountable to do what they say," said Jim Taylor of Taylor Biomass Energy, which is planning to build the huge biomass plant in Montgomery.

"Energy cost is possibly the U.S.'s biggest sleeping giant disaster waiting to happen."

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## Energy from the ground

New York's cold winters and hot summers make geothermal heat pumps highly attractive components of a fossil fuel-free future.

Using coils buried in the ground, the systems convert the Earth's natural temperature to heat and cool antifreeze to provide heating and cooling for homes. Used with an alternative energy source, such as solar, wind or hydropower, the systems can render utility bills negligible, thus the term "net zero."

The Green Acres development in New Paltz provides a model for the use of this technology.

Beaver Dam Estates, a proposed 38-single-family home subdivision in the Town of Montgomery also offers geothermal heat pumps as part of its homes - and has sold five houses with the technology, according to Mal Meyerson, the developer. The cost of the technology would be covered within a year through fuel savings, making the option to take the heat pumps irresistible to buyers, Meyerson said.

Turning garbage into energy

No discussion about alternative energy in the mid-Hudson area would be complete without mentioning Taylor Biomass Energy, which would add 20 megawatts of energy to the grid, enough to power 23,000 single-family homes. As a comparison, the Town of Montgomery, where the plant is located, has 5,900 homes.

The \$145 million project to build 200,000 square feet of space has gotten a \$104 million federal loan guarantee.

Using a patented noncombustible technology, the biomass gasifier would disintegrate organic materials sorted out of the garbage waste stream to generate a synthesis gas that also could be used potentially to fuel vehicles, according to Jim Taylor, who owns both the company and Taylor Recycling.

## Power from the sun

Any alternative energy future in our region likely will include an abundance of solar arrays on houses, apartments, commercial buildings and empty fields.

Driving the trend is rebates, notably through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, as well as state and federal tax credits that cover nearly half the cost of commercial and residential installations.

Sales also have jumped, thanks to improvements in the efficiency of photovoltaic panels, as well as a 200 percent reduction in their cost the last three years, said Vince Cozzolino, president and CEO of The Solar Energy Consortium in Kingston.

Solar thermal technology, which uses solar energy to heat hot water systems, also is gaining steam thanks to the same state and federal tax credits, improved efficiency and quality, as well as a New York State Energy Research and Development Authority rebate of up to \$4,000 for systems used together with existing electric water heaters, said Ron Kamen, president of the New York Solar Energy Industries

competition that will award \$10,000 to the nonprofit that most reduces its energy usage within a year.

Meanwhile, the state's Green Jobs-Green New York program, which offers homeowners free or low-cost energy audits, as well as up to \$13,000 of low-interest loans to finance energy efficiency or retrofit projects, is about to pick up its marketing efforts.

An important part of energy reduction is the ability to measure energy usage municipality by municipality, as well as homeowner by homeowner on the grid. Technologies to allow this would be part of a "smart grid" that could turn down energy use region by region and town by town on demand.

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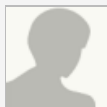
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The Hudson Valley is poised to become a major manufacturing center for solar energy parts and equipment. The consortium already has several manufacturers of solar parts or panels, as well as 90 partners across the country. It expects to add 191 jobs in 2011 in Orange, Ulster and Dutchess counties, Cozzolino said.

The visibility of solar panels has been given a big boost by large-scale solar farm projects, such as in the Town of Esopus, where a 300-panel array lies next to its new energy efficient Town Hall.

Solar farms are also proposed for the Stewart Air National Guard Base in Newburgh and in the Town of Fallsburg, where the municipality proposes putting up a 10 megawatt array on a capped municipal landfill to sell electricity to two adjacent jails.

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**Rich Gately**

Micro renewable energy will be and should be the norm in the HV, Catskills and beyond. Hybrid systems will produce the most reliability. It's good to see the TH Record reporting on this and should more often, to many it is the first connection to news in our area. Keep up the reporting of renewable energy issues and stories in our area. Regards,  
Rich @ NY Homesteader dot com  
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