

#57 AN ENERGY POWER AUTHORITY FOR SULLIVAN COUNTY

One possibility for phase three of the Sullivan County Commission for Sustainable Energy is the formation of an Energy Authority. Since work on an electric utility is projected to start in 2008, this column introduces basic information to stimulate public participation.

The four most common types of electrical utilities are electric cooperatives, investor-owned utilities, municipal systems and state or federal utilities. Just 45 minutes away is the Delaware County Electric Cooperative. Owned by the members it serves, this electric utility purchases electricity from the power grid and distributes it to members on a non-profit basis. This results in lower costs of electricity, better service and customer participation in decision-making. It also enable decisions about purchasing electricity from different markets and energy providers that give high priority to green energy sources. The Delaware County Electric Cooperative is also providing leadership in local sustainable energy management by moving into the more strategic area of electricity production through the development of wind farms, a gas-to-electricity project at a local land fill and other very innovative clean energy production systems that keep profits, jobs, environmental, health and economic benefits local.

A second type of electric utility is one that distributes or generates electricity for profit. NYSEG is a well known example. It is owned by its stockholders and controlled by - well that is a continuing saga. In fact, NYSEG is owned by a large holding company that owns several other electric utilities in the northeast. The parent company is currently negotiating purchase by Iberdrola of Spain. Iberdrola of Spain is currently trying to fend off a hostile take over by a multinational French company.

A municipal electric utilities is a third type. We are familiar with such utilities in our area that provide other municipal services such as sewer and water. They could also provide high speed internet, cable, telephone. They are non-profits and tax free entities. We would do well to explore one or more of the several organizational and service types of municipal electric utilities. More on this later.

State and Federal Power Agencies are mentioned because they exist. Their relevance for Sullivan County Electric Utility is that the New York State Power Authority produces billions of kwhs of hydro-power which are available for purchase as green, sustainable electricity for our local needs. This electricity can be incorporated into innovative energy systems that manage peak and off peak energy consumption and utilize hydrogen battery storage and other power technologies that provide experience and leadership in the ever changing energy sector of our national and local economy. This is very economic electricity and of course, very clean, very green, very sustainable. We should inventory local hydro electrical resources. Hydro power is often by far the most cost effective investment in renewable energy production.

Sullivan County can develop an electric power authority before the year is out. It costs very little to establish - a chair, computer, phone and professional staff will get us started at the operational level

What is needed is widespread, focused public discussion. This is especially true in this current time of momentum for major gas drilling in our area. We already know that our previous energy choices are destroying essential life support systems. It does not get

more basic than this. Renewable, clean, affordable, profitable, locally managed energy sources are available. We can decide for ourselves and provide for ourselves.