Community-Led Initiative Changes Durham’s Energy Service Provider

Durham Community Power Coalition’s efforts to reach sustainability have been met with success

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In early January, the town of Durham introduced the Durham Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (DCPCNH), as a new way of looking at energy on a community level. The program allows residents to explore alternative energy sources with sustainability in mind.

Durham is known for its efforts in sustainability; the University of New Hampshire (UNH), which is set in the heart of town, is ranked nationally for its green power. The small community has also set forth its own initiatives, the latest being the DCPCNH. Founded as a branch of the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH), the aim of the program is to empower communities to realize their energy goals.

Before the plan was to take flight in Durham, Town Administrator Tom Selig sat down at his computer and decided he was going to go through a process many regular consumers avoid: changing his home’s source of energy.

“The reality is, most people don’t have the time to think about it,” he said, regarding switching energy providers.

The desire to be greener is something Selig has been striving for, not only personally, but on a town-wide level.

Though Selig was confident in his current program’s capabilities, he wanted to experience what it was like finding a better deal than Eversource, a commonly used energy provider in Southern New Hampshire. When his five-month contract with Eversource ended, he tried to opt back in, putting the date in his calendar so he wouldn’t forget.

“It was hard to get a live person, and they didn’t really want to switch me back. They made it pretty difficult,” Selig stated.

The idea of the DCPCNH was to eliminate this sense of individuality and instead create a sense of unity when it comes to energy providers.

“Relying on the individual customers to care enough about their bill to look into it, to begin to understand how their bill is put together is kind of inefficient,” said Selig.

Energy contracts can often be complicated. Generally, they are short-term and can change depending on renewal systems. By allowing consumers of energy in Durham to band together in buying power, the whole ordeal becomes far less strenuous.

“There was an effort, really spearheaded by the town of Hanover and the city of Lebanon, to change the state laws to allow municipalities to work together and pool all of the power customers in their communities,” Selig said.

Bringing an entire town to the market at the same time reduces prices and creates a community request for cleaner energy. The bill that allows municipalities to do this, House Bill 315, was passed over three years ago. Shortly after, the public entity CPCNH was born.
Though Durham was a part of the initial towns that comprised CPCNH, the town waited to monitor the results of the other municipalities involved. Some of these cities include Exeter, Portsmouth, Rye, Hanover, Lebanon, Nashua and more. Seeing that it was successful for the spring and fall launches gave Selig and his team the confidence to move forward.

Enacted on Feb. 1, Durham residents were defaulted to the new energy program unless they specified otherwise, meaning they could contact the Durham Town Hall to opt out of the program. Durham mailed all necessary information about the program and held a public forum to answer any questions or concerns.

As part of the new program, customers can expect 32-33% savings off of Eversource’s rate on the Granite Basic plan, which is the default service option, according to Community Power Coalition’s website. The Granite Basic plan costs around $53 a month.

“We were able to purchase power at a cheaper rate than Eversource. So, right now we have kind of succeeded at half our quest,” he said. “But it's the same renewable mix as Eversource.”

Residents can also choose to opt for greener power by choosing the Granite Plus, Clean 50, or Clean 100 plan. Those plans cost about $55 a month, $61 a month and $81 a month, respectively, as noted on the Coalition's website.

Selig stated that the town made a promise to its residents to procure cheaper rates, and if it couldn’t be done with greener energy, the town would still move forward to ensure that. Yet, there is comfort in knowing that people have the option to choose and make the change easily.

Eversource still maintains the responsibility of handling power lines and other physical aspects of delivering power. This means that when there are outages, Eversource is in charge of restoration. However, according to Selig, the company is pleased with the initiative and is supportive of the transition.

The shift overall has been seamless, according to Selig, which has been encouraging for a community driven by sustainability.