



Support demand for renewable energy

By RON KLATTENBERG

As chairman of Middletown's Clean Energy Taskforce, I wish to respond to the excellent and provocative issue raised in Mr. Jorgensen's Letter to the Editor on Jan. 2, "Green customers face rate hike, too."

Mr. Jorgensen expressed concern that supporters of clean, renewable energy participating in the CTCleanEnergyOptions Program are subject to the same electric rate increases as those not participating, when in fact, it is the rising cost of fossil fuels to generate electricity driving this exorbitant 22 percent increase. He is absolutely correct and it is a

valid and compelling concern. This issue must be addressed soon by the DPUC and state legislators.

Fortunately or unfortunately, this is the current state of clean energy programs today:

- The CTCleanEnergyOptions Program is a renewable energy credit program. Over 6,500 electric customers have signed up for clean renewable energy in Connecticut, to date, because it is good for the environment, necessary for our nation's energy independence and, eventually, will be good for the state economy and ratepayers. Every kilowatt-hour of energy consumed by participants in the program is directly matched with renewable energy in our region.

- The rate structure for clean energy customers is outdated and needs to be changed. Consideration must be given by the DPUC and state legislatures for electric rates that account for participation in the CTCleanEnergyOptions program. For those willing to pay a slight premium for wind, hydroelectric and/or landfill gas to generate electricity we should be rewarded. Participation reduces oil consumption thereby diversifying the energy mix and stabilizing rates. This would also create a real financial incentive to participants.

- Through the CT Clean Energy Fund, homeowners, businesses and institutions now have monetary incentives to

install renewable energy systems (i.e., solar panels) on buildings. As ratepayers, we all contribute monthly to this fund and should take advantage of the opportunities it represents. Rising electric rates are offset by these systems because each kilowatt of electricity generated reduces your electric bills by that same amount. However, those individuals having installed such onsite systems are not allowed to charge back excess electricity to the utility at the full rate. Currently, such systems can only gain "credit" from the utilities.

Public policy offers no incentives to purchase and install larger private clean energy systems with excess power. Such an incentive would have a profound effect on diversifying the state fuel mix and distributing the electric load. The DPUC will soon be holding hearings on variable rates for homes and businesses and this issue should be a part of the decision-making.

Currently, Middletown spends \$1.8 million on electricity, annually. When gas, diesel, fuel oil and natural gas are included the cost is \$2.5 million. The Clean Energy Taskforce is currently evaluation costs and benefits of entering into a long term (10- to 20-year) contract with a solar energy supplier that will fix the cost of electricity from solar panels installed on a large municipal building.

Such a contract has the potential to save the city from escalating electric rates and make budgeting more manageable and predictable. The Taskforce is also conducting trials for a new spark plug for city vehicles that is safe and proven to reduce gas consumption by 10 percent. We have to find and invest in new solutions for Middletown's energy needs.

Despite the shortcomings of the current electricity situation and its impacts on the CTCleanEnergyOptions Program, the future of renewables holds great hope and promise if we all continue to support the demand by signing up or installing renewable energy systems. To date, over 180 residents in Middletown joined the program making Middletown the third highest in the state.

Soon, we will be eligible for a second free 1 kilowatt solar energy panel from the CT Clean Energy Fund. The existing high school is currently the preferred site for these panels.

Now is the time to be more vocal about supporting renewable energy in order for the market to grow which will lead to greater private investments and diversify our state energy mix ... all of which will result in a healthier environment and stronger economy for Middletown and Connecticut!

Ron Klattenberg is a Middletown City Councilman and chairman of the Middletown Clean Energy Taskforce.