

Town realizes benefits of work with ESCO

By Kristi Williams

At a time when communities and residents are examining every opportunity to control energy costs, the town of Belmont reports that it is realizing benefits from working with an energy services company (ESCO).

Two Belmont officials described the town's "cash-neutral" program to make efficiency improvements in town facilities during the MMA's Green Communities Workshop on Nov. 7 in Sturbridge.

Belmont began its process six years ago, when an ad hoc committee that was formed under the Municipal Light Department developed and advertised an RFP for efficiency projects in seven school buildings, the police department, the library, two public works facilities, a skating rink and the light department. The RFP called for the improvements to be funded through energy-related savings that would be realized in the operating budget as a result of the



Jenny Fallon, a member of Belmont's Facilities Energy Management Program Committee, speaks during the MMA's Green Communities Workshop in Sturbridge.

projects.

In April 2004, consultants and a representative from Rebuild America met with the town's Building Committee to educate them on the ESCO process. In September 2005, the town received a full energy audit and a contract was signed. Construction was completed by the spring of 2006, and loan payments began that July. Money borrowed by the

town to fund construction was paid back to the lender through the energy savings.

As the town began paying off its loans, it also began the measurement and verification phase. The town had the option of receiving measurement and verification services from the ESCO based on stipulated savings, or the town could pay for equipment to measure the savings itself.

The 10-year ESCO contract included five town and seven school buildings at a total cost of \$1.7 million – \$1.1 million in energy conservation measures (with a 10-year payback) and \$600,000 in capital equipment investments (including lighting improvements and controls, water-conserving plumbing fixtures, energy management systems, boiler controllers, a pool cover, vending machine controllers, and steam trap repairs).

The total projected annual savings is \$202,000, according to Jenny Fallon, a member of the Facilities Energy Management Program Committee.

Fallon said the town is generally satisfied with the project, but there are some challenges involved in working with an ESCO. The measure and verification phase may be unclear, she said, and the projects do cost money, though savings can be bundled.

There are also political issues involved when doing a

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town-wide project that some may not support, she said. Fallon advises openness throughout the process as a way to get people on board.

Fallon said the Department of Energy Resources provided valuable assistance, and the project may become a starting point for a town energy and resources policy.

Belmont Town Administrator Tom Younger addressed other energy conservation measures the town is now taking.

He said the new senior center, which will meet energy-efficiency certification standards, will soon be the site of the town's evening meetings, rather than the less-efficient Town Hall.

Town Hall is now closing on Mondays that precede Tuesday holidays and Fridays that follow Thursday holidays so it can reduce heating costs, particularly on days when few people would be at work anyway. (Town hall will be open later to make up the hours.)

He said the town is now changing its street lighting to lower wattage bulbs, for a projected savings of \$86,000 annually.

Belmont is also negotiating its fuel contract and looking into purchasing hybrid vehicles for lightly used town cars.

More than 150 local officials from across the state attended the Green Communities meeting. *