

Town Airs Proposal to Allow for Alternative Electricity Supplier

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Peter Boody photo

Lynn Arthur of the Sustainable Southampton Green Energy Committee discusses the CCA concept at a Town Board hearing on November 27.

“Before we move forward, we have to know all the pros and cons,” Supervisor Jay Schneiderman said Tuesday night of a proposal to begin the process of establishing a CCA or Community Choice Aggregation Energy Program in the Town of Southampton.

Creating a CCA here would allow the town’s consumers to band together to seek energy from renewable sources or at better rates from energy suppliers other the PSE&G. The alternative energy would be supplied over existing LIPA transmission lines

The proposal was the subject of an initial public hearing at Tuesday’s Town Board meeting at which energy consultant Lynn Arthur, a member of the Sustainability Committee, outlined how a CCA would work and nine other people, including Dieter von Lehston, co-chair of the committee, spoke in favor of the proposal.

But one speaker at the hearing cautioned that the town cannot achieve energy savings without working with other municipalities. Joan Morgan McGivern of the East Hampton Town Energy Sustainability Committee said she was concerned “your town alone will not have the market power” to negotiate lower rates.

“It takes multiple municipalities to come together” under the CCA umbrella to achieve success, she added, citing the 20 municipalities that formed a CCA called Sustainable Westchester. “This is the lesson to be learned,” she added, urging Southampton Town “reach out to neighboring towns and villages” before going alone.

County Legislator Bridget Fleming, in a letter read by an aide, wrote that she was working to see the county undertake a feasibility study for a CCA that would cover all of Suffolk. "I wish you well and look forward to working with you," she wrote the board.

The Town Board adjourned the hearing until January 11, 2018, with one of the proposal's sponsors, Councilman John Bouvier, explaining the board was only exploring the idea and would continue to seek public comment.

Promoted by the town's Sustainable Southampton Green Energy Committee, the CCA proposal is in the form of a local law that would add a new chapter establishing the framework under which the Town Board could set up a CCA.

Since the state's Public Service Commission first approved the CCA concept, some 27 towns and villages in New York State currently operate CCAs. Southampton would be the first on Long Island.

Supervisor Schneiderman, who has expressed skepticism at past board work sessions about the suitability of a CCA program here, told Ms. Arthur that the board of LIPA — which owns the infrastructure through which PSE&G's electricity is delivered on Long Island — would have to approve the town's departure from the PSE&G service system.

He urged Ms. Arthur "to involve them in a conversation to know if they're going to allow it."

In her presentation, Ms. Arthur said the Sustainability Committee felt the town had a duty to explore the idea of a CCA here. The town's policies promoting energy efficiency and alternative sources, she said, had already caused demand in the town to flatten and fall below the upward curve for the region on which PSE&G basis its rates.

"If we can manage our demand," Ms. Arthur said, "we mitigate the need for additional infrastructure," and by "managing our growth, we keep prices down."

One of the risks, Mr. Schneiderman countered, was getting locked in to a rate with a new supplier even if market rates for energy fall.

"First of all," Ms. Arthur said, the town's CCA administrator could seek a contract with either a fixed or fluctuating price. Also, the town's consumers could each opt out of the CCA at any time with no penalty.

Adopting the local law, argued Mr. von Lehston of the Sustainability Committee, "doesn't cost anything" and would not commit the town to launching a CCA. "Please pass the local law," he said, urging the board "to move the needle forward in achieving our goal" of 100-percent energy sustainability.