

Anne Courtemanche ~ Aitkin Township ~ Aitkin County

Powering Our Future – Energy to Build on in Your Township

Modern America is a ‘plugged in’ and ‘powered up’ society. Even in the remote parts of this continent, people have technology at their fingertip, all of which is powered by energy. A well-powered society is informed, educated, mobile, creative and even entertained. As communities thrive and grow, the need for safe reliable energy sources also grows. Yet we revert to a ‘not in my backyard’ mentality (NIMBY) when it is near to our communities. It is a conundrum that townships are forced to face.

Even where we get our energy and what will create energy is changing rapidly. Traditional energy sources are found in raw forms like oil, coal and gas, or generated and stored in batteries from wind and solar. However, there have been great advancements in providing energy (ie tidal current, 3-D seismic exploration, solid state and aluminum air batteries, etc.). Townships are on the front line balancing the development of and delivering these exciting new energy resources and the responsibility of keeping residents safe, maintaining their quality of life, and being sound environmental stewards. The most successful decisions would take in-depth researching and planning, educating the public, and maintaining strong community dialogue.

Since the evolution of energy development has made great strides in efficiency and innovation, townships need to be just as ‘cutting edge,’ well-informed, and prepared to address the concerns of their citizens. Townships are the right level of government to meet these needs and concerns as neighbors while seeking the long-term success of their community.

Successful energy projects would start well with solid planning and research. Responsible development of clean and sustainable energy is important, especially when it is in our own neighborhood and for our consumption. Clean, safe and efficient energy technologies continue to be invented and perfected, and township leaders would do well to be knowledgeable and do the research. The knowledge gained could be shared at township meetings and disseminated to the general public. When community members know the plan and the facts and reasoning behind it, they are more likely to back the plan and even participate in decision-making and work. As with all projects, open communication is paramount. People’s concerns are always valid. Areas of reasonable development should be identified through a community process before a project is envisioned, not after it is proposed. In order to create a constructive environment, it is essential to keep the lines of communication open and information continual so the public knows what is happening.

Township leaders must be informed, plan, educate and listen when working on developments to provide steady and reliable sources of energy. But what better places and people to do just that than ‘right in my back yard?’ The unified community of the township can be an exemplary story of working together to make economically and environmentally sound decisions to solve the challenges of energy demands.