

Gus Boedigheimer ~ Harris Township ~ Itasca County

Powering Our Future – Energy to Build on in Your Township

With the rising demand, increased awareness of, and interest of property owners to seek and use renewable energy, it is vital that townships take an active role in helping to balance the needs of its residents while maintaining a safe, healthy, and stable community. For this to happen, townships need to be proactive in discussing, researching, and addressing a variety of options to address renewable energies such as enacting ordinances to protect residents, encouraging innovation of property owners, and seeking supplemental support.

Most townships have enacted various ordinances and should seriously consider adding a renewable energy ordinance to protect the interests of all property owners as well as provide clear guidelines for regulating the development and use of renewable energies. Such an ordinance could be a stand-alone policy or drafted into an existing zoning and planning ordinance, or amended as part of a larger, county ordinance. It may address what types of renewable energies are permitted, where they can be located, and other limitations and/or expectations. According to an article written by Stephen A. Delie, benefits of a well-written 'ordinance promotes sustainable energy production, increases a township's tax base, promotes job growth, encourages the rental or sale of unused or underused land, ensures that solar energy production is harmonious with surrounding land uses and the township in general; and lessens the chance of nuisance issues arising in the future.'

Once townships have established clear ordinances, it would be beneficial for both the township and property owners to support and promote the innovation of renewable energies by providing information, encouragement, and monetary access. Various grants, loans, tax credits, and other funding sources exist specifically for the innovation and development of renewable energies, however, homeowners and property owners may be unaware of where or how to access these resources. It is vital that townships reach out to its members and communicate regularly through mailings such as newsletters, well-maintained websites, and the use of social media such as Facebook, in order to disseminate such information. Creating many open lines of communication allows all members to feel secure while allowing the township to form trusted relationships while providing support, encouragement, and information.

It is also important for townships to survey their geographic location to understand not only the possibilities and options for renewable energies, but also the limitations that may exist. There are many towns and communities that are powered entirely by renewable energy throughout the United States. Although they are powered entirely by renewable energy, it does not mean they are securing it from within. For example, Aspen, Colorado provides about 80% of its renewable energy through wind and hydroelectricity. It does supplement the remaining 20% by purchasing wind power from other states, as it is more cost effective than building a third hydroelectric plant.

With some foresight, planning, and open communication, townships and its members can successfully take advantage of the benefits of renewable energy while providing a safe, healthy, and stable community to live in.