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LOOKING FORWARD to doing a study of the feasibility of a district energy plan for Hudson and neighboring Greenport are, from left, Sadie Coulter, Maria Miller and Matt de la Houssaye of the nonprofit group Eco-Grid.

Green light for power alternative

Nonprofit gets \$100,000 contract from state agency to study Hudson energy plan

By **LARRY RULISON**
Business writer

HUDSON — The city of Hudson has a vision of one day being a “net-zero” energy community, and a new study by a local nonprofit is lighting the way.

The group is called Eco-Grid. Last month, it was awarded a \$100,000 contract from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to do a 12-month feasibility and engineering study for a so-called district energy plan for Hudson and neighboring Greenport.

The entire study will cost nearly \$340,000, but Eco-Grid is getting about \$240,000 in in-kind labor from various organizations to complete it. A net-zero energy community is one that produces as much energy locally as it consumes.

What the study will determine

Here are some key aspects of Eco-Grid's \$339,000 feasibility study of a district energy system for Hudson and Greenport:

- 1. Create** a project advisory group of local community leaders
- 2. Analyze** possible sites, permitting, design and technologies
- 3. Look** at local biomass fuel supply for a power plant
- 4. Develop** estimate of air emissions from the power plant and technologies to reduce them
- 5. Identify** who would own the plant
- 6. Prepare** a cost estimate and potential energy sales

Source: Eco-Grid

“We’re very honored and proud,” Eco-Grid Executive Director Maria Miller said about the NYSERDA contract. “It’s nice recognition. It certainly gives us visibility. It’s a new and better stage of growth (for the group).”

District energy is not a new concept. Similar to cogeneration, it involves pro-

ducing electricity and distributing the byproduct — hot water, steam or chilled water — to residential and commercial customers. The concept is in use in St. Paul, Minn., and in Jamestown in western New York. It also is popular in northern Europe.

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"The vast majority of single-family homes in Denmark are heated through district energy systems," said Eco-Grid project manager Matt de la Houssaye.

NYSERDA spokesman Ray Hull said the agency has been funding the Jamestown project for decades and may be doing more with that city if it seeks to upgrade its system.

"Now there is a new effort afoot (in Jamestown)," Hull said.

Although district energy can be generated in a variety of ways, Eco-Grid wants to create a system fueled by renewable energy sources such as biomass.

The NYSERDA contract stipulates that the Eco-Grid analysis look at waste wood, agricultural residues, energy crops and other potential biomass sources within

a 50-mile radius of the proposed plant.

Eco-Grid does not know how large a facility would be built, where it would be built or how much the system would cost. Those questions will be addressed by the feasibility study.

"All options are on the table," de la Houssaye said.

However, the NYSERDA contract says that a "preliminary analysis" found that a 5-megawatt biomass-fired plant that would require 35,000 tons of wood chips annually would provide hot water for heating for the community and 18 million kilowatt-hours of electricity that would be sold into the power market. The average American consumes about 11,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year.

Another key aspect of the pro-

ject would be to stimulate the local economy. Under the contract, Eco-Grid is required to develop a plan for "maximizing the use" of local and state labor and materials.

Eco-Grid is also required to evaluate the current loss to the local economy from inefficient energy use and the loss of energy dollars to out-of-state businesses. Eco-Grid must also come up with ownership models for the project, including how local investors can be involved.

"We're looking at the loss of energy dollars locally, and how they can be (retained)," de la Houssaye said.

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