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Climate change article at several Town Meetings

From My Perspective: A column by Birgit Johanson

This year the residents of Jaffrey have the opportunity to make a significant contribution to a better future. Along with 180 other cities and towns in the state of New Hampshire, we have a climate change warrant article that reads, in part, as follows:

“To see if the town will go on record in support of effective actions by the President and the Congress to address the issue of climate change, which is increasingly harmful to the environment and economy of New Hampshire and to the future well being of the people of Jaffrey.

“These actions include:

“Establishment of a national program requiring reductions of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the U.S. economy.

“Creation of a major national research initiative to foster rapid development of sustainable energy technologies thereby stimulating new jobs and investment.

“In addition, the town of Jaffrey encourages New Hampshire citizens to work for emission reductions within their communities, and we ask our Selectmen to consider the appointment of a voluntary energy committee to recommend local steps to save energy and reduce emissions.”

On a town level, this means encouraging our builders, our planners, our schools and businesses to be aware of energy use and to take advantage of the best reasonable means of conserving and using energy to achieve a clean high standard. If you read the above warrant article, it carefully protects the bottom line because ultimately, we all have a share in the cost of implementing change.

On a national level, there is a great deal of attention being focused on corn biofuels and the technologies that will allow us to switch from old fuel sources. In the Midwest that is part of a viable strategy and biorefineries are springing up everywhere. However, here in the Northeast, we are looking at technologies that utilize our biggest natural resource and that is our abundant forest.

Research and recommendations for the Northeast include conservation strategies that reduce energy consumption, increase the percentage of clean energy that we use, and importantly, begin to actively sequester carbon. New Hampshire may well be ahead of the nation in this respect because our state is the second most forested in the country.

Forests actively sequester carbon every day. Through their natural process of growth and decay, trees pull carbon from the atmosphere and return it to the earth. The importance of this function cannot be overstated. Yet in addition, forests provide clean renewable fuels that can displace older, more harmful technologies and the future looks bright as biofuels made from wood are coming into being. In addition, research is being done to replace petroleum-based manufactured goods with wood-based alternatives so that everyday items such as polyester can be made within a sustainable framework.

These are only some of the technologies and acknowledgements that we are learning to make about our natural environment. Currently New Hampshire is experiencing a huge loss of revenue as a result of climate change and globalization. Manufacturing jobs have gone overseas, and local economies can benefit from a reduced dependence on foreign energy and imported goods, including agricultural products. The landscapes that we know and love are more than picturesque scenery.

They are integral to the functional well being of the planet and all of its inhabitants. The more we are able to take responsibility at home for our resource use and strategies, the better outcomes we will have.

We have available to us a very timely article that asks for your support. Please vote yes on article 32 at Town Meeting. On behalf of the Jaffrey Conservation Commission, we encourage all residents to become more involved and to take steps to actively improve the way we live and work.

Birgit Johanson is a member of the Jaffrey Conservation Commission.

547-3207 work.

Thursday, March 15, 2007

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