

Community power on ballot

By Jen O'Brien

Beacon staff writer

This March, voters will be asked to pass an initiative called the Community Power Project. This project takes the power of setting electric utility rates out of the hands of Eversource, and into the hands of the municipality via a company called Standard Power, an electricity supply broker, with the main goals of reducing energy costs and sourcing from renewable sources.

"Community power is where the municipality negotiates electricity prices for residents and small businesses," says Emily Mann, a community power consultant at Standard Power. "It brings the power of the competitive market to small customers."

"Eversource is not mandated to try to find the cheapest rate," says New Boston Energy Commission Chairman Ryan Nealley. "They have a monopoly, whereas corporations like Standard Power really are trying to find a cheaper rate, because otherwise there's no reason to sign up with them. They have a far higher incentive."

If the bill is passed in March, qualifying homes will automatically be opted into the program, but can opt out at any time. Eversource still owns the power lines, and charges for energy delivery, but they do not manufacture or own the power itself, which will now be competitively sourced by Standard Power.

There is no cost to the town or taxpayers, only a potential for energy cost savings. The state senate bill enjoyed bipartisan support when it was passed in 2022.

"Community power is designed to save customers money," says Mann. "Like the competitive market, the savings aren't guaranteed, but over time the goals are cost savings and more renewable energy choices."

“Instead of each person trying to go out and buy power, all 1,200 households in New Boston are coming together to buy power,” says Neally.

The community power initiative is the latest effort from the New Boston Energy Commission to bring efficiency to New Boston. Last year, the group proposed and managed changing all streetlights from fluorescent to LED. They saved half the cost of installation through a state incentive, and the lights have already paid themselves off in energy cost savings.

The New Boston Energy Commission also managed the solar power project at the library, which produces over 100% of the library's energy needs in a year, reducing energy costs for taxpayers.