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Town of Boone's Sustainability Committee explores renewable energy options

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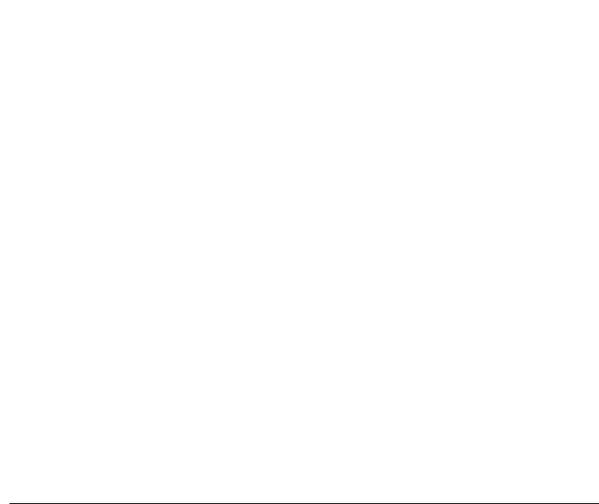
A solar array sits on top of the Plemmons Student Union on the Appalachian State University campus. As New company, examines renewable energy options, forecasts indicate its customers will be able to choose to purchase less than what they are currently paying for their energy today.

Photo by Marie Freeman/Appalachian State University



BOONE — New River Light and Power General Manager Ed Miller met with the town of Boone's Sustainability Committee on Thursday, June 10, to present NRLP's future hopes and plans for introducing more renewable energy sources to customers in the Boone area.

NRLP is a nonprofit operating unit of Appalachian State University. The nonprofit has been providing power to Appalachian State University and the larger Boone community since 1915, according to Appalachian State University. The university stated that NRLP currently has 26 employees and provides power for nearly 8,100 residential and commercial customers and "continues to purchase its power from Blue Ridge Energy of Lenoir." Miller stated that NRLP is currently one of the "lowest cost electricity companies in the region."



Looking to introduce more sustainable energy to the organization, Miller said that customers of NRLP have been polled about their interest in renewable energy and that many customers were willing to pay \$5-10 more a month to have renewable energy sources included in their services. The organization has started looking into renewable options under the North Carolina Utilities Commission and with a new contract with Carolina Power Partners.

The Sustainability Committee discussed NRLP's energy audits, a service the organization provides for customers to understand their energy usage and efficiency. Despite the service being free, Miller noted, very few customers were

opting to request audits. The demand for audits, according to Miller, has been relatively low due to milder weather and lower energy costs. Energy audits would enable customers to become more educated about their energy use. Miller and the committee discussed methods of informing NRLP's customers about this service and how the town of Boone could contribute to this effort as well as the possibility of requiring audits in the future during property sales.

George Santucci, the new sustainability and special projects manager for the town of Boone, explained that audits cannot be required unless it is mandated by state government, such as through state building or energy codes that are adopted and authorized by the state for local jurisdictions to make those requirements. Santucci is also a member of the NC Cities Initiative, a collaboration among local governments in the state working to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions according to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. He said that the Cities Initiative is looking into how energy audits can be introduced more into local governments throughout the state.

Miller expanded on the topic of education further in discussing the opportunity to educate student residents of Boone about their energy use and purchasing options. Miller said that roughly 6,000 students are housed on Appalachian State University's campus and about 14,000 more students live in the town of Boone. Noting that it is often many students' first experiences living without their parents, Miller stated that there is an opportunity to find ways to make renewable energy accessible to these

students. Ultimately, he said that there are many different groups with varying needs in education about energy ranging from students to long-time residents and homeowners.

With New River Lights and Power, Miller is hoping to offer hydroelectric power and solar power to the residents of Boone. The town of Boone has partnered with NLRP and with Blue Ridge Energy in committing to purchase renewable energy as part of its sustainability projects planned by the town of Boone's Sustainability Committee. The focus on increasing usage of renewables is part of the town's larger sustainability goals, which include but are not limited to climate neutrality in municipal operations by 2030, transitioning municipal operations to 100 percent clean renewable energy by 2040 and transitioning the entire town of Boone to 100 percent clean renewable energy by 2050.

Marisa Mecke is a Report for America corps member for Mountain Times Publications. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

