

Earth, wind and power

Southold eyes windmill and geothermal system for power

By Brian Harmon

When it comes to powering up and heating Peconic School and the Peconic recreation center, the Town of Southold is looking to go green — way green.

Town Board members said Tuesday the town will spend \$7,000 on creating the engineering design of a geothermal energy system that would provide heat to the two buildings. The board also agreed to solicit estimates for a wind turbine that would provide electricity at the site.

A geothermal energy system — which generates power from natural steam, deep underground — would involve a substantial start-up cost, but the method would likely pay for itself within seven years, town engineer Jamie Richter told the Town Board.

The cost of installing the two wells that would be needed to heat the school and recreation center would be about \$40,000. Another \$20,000 would be needed to convert the existing heating system to geothermal.

But once it's in place, the geothermal system would cost about \$5,800 to

operate yearly, compared with \$9,400 for a gas-fired system and \$15,200 for a system using oil, according to the town engineer.

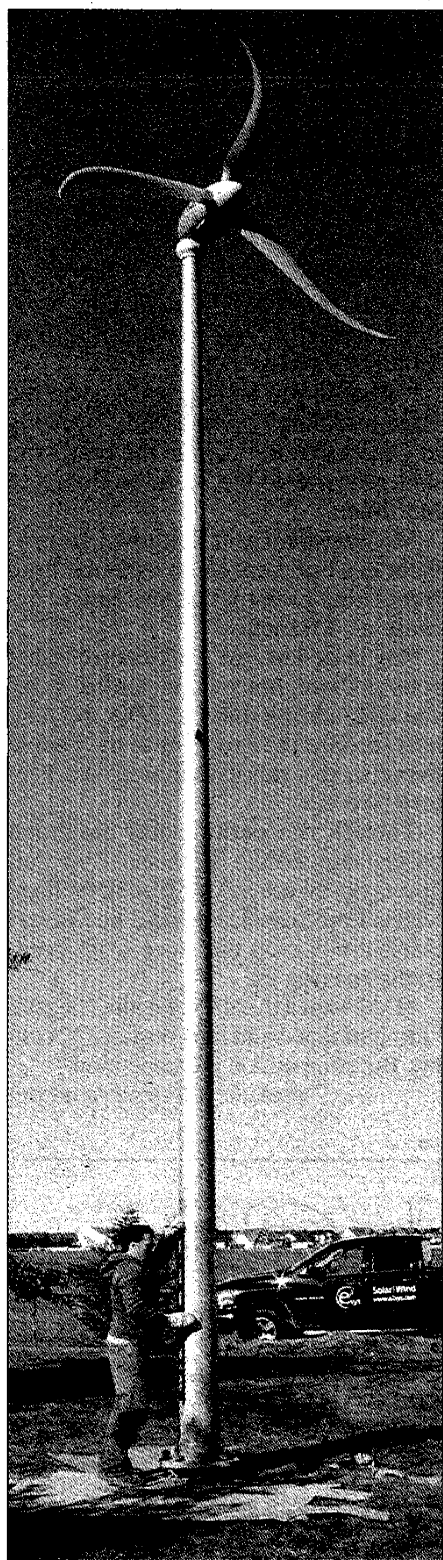
"The payback time for geothermal compared to gas would be approximately seven years," Mr. Richter said. "The payback for geothermal compared to oil would be approximately four years."

"We're not talking about somebody's home, which they may not own in five or 10 years. These buildings are going to be there for decades," Councilman Vincent Orlando said Tuesday during a Town Board meeting break. "The geothermal system will pay for itself in seven years. It's a no-brainer."

Town Supervisor Scott Russell made the pitch for the town to put out a request for proposals for the installation of a wind turbine on the Peconic School property.

"There are four or five outfits in the area that could offer us some sort of price guide for installation and tell us what our savings could be in energy costs," Mr.

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Suffolk Times photo courtesy of Eastern Energy Systems

A wind turbine such as this one in Riverhead could help power the former Peconic School and the town recreation center.

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Russell said.

State and federal tax credits for windmills would cut the installation price nearly in half. Furthermore, Mr. Russell said, the Long Island Power Authority offers incentives to towns investing in wind generation, something they call "net metering." Under the program, customers who generate electricity with wind generators will be eligible to receive credit for the electricity they generate that's exported back to LIPA's grid.

Mr. Russell said he would like to see the town "mix and mingle" different forms of energy on the Peconic property.

The Town Board recently authorized the town's renewable energy committee to develop wording for legislation that would allow residents to install wind turbines on their property.

Private wind turbines are legal in Southold, but the property must be at least seven acres and zoned for agriculture — though the town is exempt from its own coding and could install a wind turbine without new legislation, assistant town attorney Kieran Corcoran said.

"If we want to put a wind-generating facility on that property, we need to consider revising the code that would make wind-generating power a possibility for everyone in the town," Councilman Tom Wickham said.

With regard to being exempt from town code, Mr. Wickham added, "I do not approve of this idea of the town doing things that ordinary people are not allowed to do."

Mr. Russell responded by reminding Mr. Wickham that the board had instructed the renewable energy committee to develop such legislation.

The town bought the Peconic School for a "bargain price" last year so that more than one community building would be available to the public. Town employees are in the process of renovating the inside, Mr. Russell said.

The town recently completed its renovation of the recreation center.

Erin Schultz contributed to this story.
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