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Boone municipal operations will transition to 25% renewable energy in 2022 with NRLP Green Power Program

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Ed Miller presented the Green Power Program to the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce's Lunch and Learn series. He said that NRLP already has had 40 residents contact the company interested in enrolling in the program which will begin Jan. 1, 2022.

Photo by Marisa Mecke



BOONE — The town of Boone is looking forward to a greener future with a new contract with New River Light and Power that will provide hydroelectric power to cover 25 percent of the town's municipal energy usage.

Moving a quarter of the town of Boone's operations to a carbon neutral energy source, the contract will begin Jan. 1, 2022, and cover all 1,650,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of energy the town purchases from NRLP. Residents and business owners will have the option to buy into NRLP's hydroelectric power at \$5 per 250 kilowatt hours when the program starts.

The town of Boone uses a total of seven million kWh of energy per year to power its municipal operations, an amount equivalent to powering around 778 residences based on NRLP's estimate of average monthly energy usage, according to Ed Miller, general manager of NRLP.

Miller announced the contract along with other community members at the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce's Lunch and Learn series on Aug. 31. NRLP, the not-for-profit public power electric utility service from Appalachian State University, gained access to this hydroelectric power through a new contract with Carolina Power Partners. The hydroelectric power comes from four existing hydropower facilities located along the Little Tennessee and Cheoah rivers in Tennessee and North Carolina, according to the NRLP website.

Miller said that the average NRLP customer uses around 750 kWh of energy per month. With this contract, he said that energy bills will decrease slightly for customers, but that he hopes some choose to invest that money back into paying a little extra for renewable energy. For around \$15, Miller said the average customer could completely offset their energy usage with carbon neutral hydroelectric power.

Town of Boone sustainability and special projects manager George Santucci said that this contract between the town and NRLP is a large step in achieving the town's sustainability goals. Santucci said that the town of Boone is aiming to have municipal operations completely carbon neutral by 2030 and 100 percent renewable by 2040. The larger goal, Santucci said, is for the entire town of Boone to use renewable energy by 2050.

The town of Boone's energy use is divided between NRLP and Blue Ridge Energy. 1,650,000 kWh are powered by NRLP while the other 5,350,000 kWh are powered by Blue Ridge Energy. Santucci said that this is because of the two largest energy-using operations, the town's Jimmy Smith Waste Water Treatment Facility and the pump that pulls raw water out of the river for use in the town, are both powered by Blue Ridge Energy.

"It is important for the community to embrace this program, take ownership of it," Santucci said, commenting on Miller's statement that as more people use the program the more NRLP will invest into the program.

Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill also spoke at the lunch, and stated that "although I've been an outspoken advocate for dam revival and have opposed hydropower" due to its environmental impact, "environmentally, this plan checks out."

Hill said that using existing infrastructure to produce more renewable energy is a strong way to achieve the town's sustainability goals. The hydroelectric facilities from which NRLP is purchasing energy have been certified by the Low Impact

Hydroelectric Institute— a nonprofit organization which aims to reduce the impact of hydropower generation through certifying projects, which avoid or reduce environmental impacts, according to their website.

To learn more about NRLP's Green Power Program, visit nrlp.appstate.edu/greenpower.

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