

## ENERGY COORDINATOR

### *Roles and Responsibilities*

**The town energy coordinator is responsible for developing a town energy plan. He or she often works closely with the local planning commission to draft the “energy plan” portion of the town plan. The energy coordinator might also conduct an energy audit of town vehicles and buildings, and works to coordinate existing energy resources in the town. He or she may also study and evaluate sources of energy which are alternatives to those presently available with a view toward the more efficient and economical utilization of existing and potential energy resources within the town.**

**History.** The office of energy coordinator was created in 1975, during the height of the national energy crisis. This position enables local government to study both public and private energy use in local communities, to develop policies that would encourage the development and utilization of alternative energy resources, and to promote conservation efforts in the town. In 1979, the criteria of a town plan under Act 200 was expanded to include an energy plan. Accordingly, many town energy coordinators work closely with the planning commission to develop this section of the town plan. 24 V.S.A. § 4382(a)(9).

**Election/Appointment.** The town may vote to authorize the selectboard to appoint an energy coordinator for a term of one year. 24 V.S.A. § 1131.

**Statutory Duties.** According to statute, the town energy coordinator “coordinate[s] existing energy resources in the town and cooperate[s] with the municipal planning commission and with those federal, state and regional agencies of government which are responsible for energy matters. ... An energy coordinator may study and evaluate sources of energy which are alternatives to those presently available with a view toward the more efficient and economical utilization of existing and potential energy resources.” 24 V.S.A. § 1131. These might include dams that could become sources of hydroelectric power and municipal forests to provide fuel for public buildings in the community.

The energy coordinator must work closely with the selectboard. He or she has no independent authority to take action on behalf of the municipality, but simply acts as a resource for the town. The coordinator must make periodic reports of his or her activities to the selectboard, as it may require, and may perform such other duties, studies or examinations as may be required by the selectboard. 24 V.S.A § 1131(d).

**The Town Energy Plan.** The town’s energy plan can be created as a stand-alone document to be presented by the energy coordinator to the selectboard for its approval and implementation, or it can be written by the energy coordinator in conjunction with the planning commission to be included as part of the town’s land use plan. Preparing a town energy plan generally involves the following five steps:

1. Collect data and inventory current and potential energy sources.

2. Assess current energy needs and uses. Identify consumption patterns of the municipality by residential, commercial/industrial, and transportation sectors.
3. Assess municipal energy future by evaluating the potential of national, regional and local trends.
4. Define and list goals, objectives and progress; describe energy programs and initiatives; coordinate with the municipal plan and bylaws; coordinate with other municipalities, regional planning commissions and programs sponsored by utilities.
5. Finalize energy plan and coordinate adoption by the selectboard or by the municipal planning commission and the voters.

**Implementing the Energy Plan.** There are many steps a community can take to implement the town's energy plan, including:

- **Town Plan.** Draft the town plan to take into account transportation issues and use of renewable energy resources.
- **Zoning Bylaws.** Craft zoning bylaws to implement relevant policies and objectives set out in the plan.
- **Town Buildings.** Upgrade insulation and heating systems in order to make buildings more energy efficient.
- **Town Forests.** Implement policies to enable use of town forests for alternative heating fuel.
- **Carpooling or Public Transportation.** Promote town-wide carpooling or work with regional public transportation projects.
- **Weatherization Assistance Programs.** Participate in community weatherization programs.
- **Intergovernmental Cooperation.** Coordinate with other towns on transportation improvements, or work together on a larger scale alternative energy project, such as using methane gas from a closed landfill, or developing a hydroelectric site.
- **Coordinate Private Initiatives.** Assist private groups such as the local boy and girl scouts, service clubs or community action organizations in providing weatherization for town buildings and low-income residents.

☛ For more information on municipal energy planning, consult: *Town Energy Planning: A Framework for Action* (1982), The Center for Rural Studies, UVM, Burlington, VT 05405 (802-656-3021); *A Guide to Municipal Energy Planning* (1993), Vermont Department of Public Service, 112 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05620; and *Earthright's Guide to Town Energy Planning in Vermont* (1992), Earthright Institute, Room 322, Gates Briggs Bldg., White River Junction, VT 05001.