

Future bright for local energy

By Liz Hacken / The Citizen

A collaboration between Cayuga County, the city of Auburn and a Utah-based company could make this the country's first energy-independent community.

Representatives from Power Innovations, a Utah-based energy company established in 1997, proposed the concept to city and county officials Monday night.

They started to take notice of the community's interest in energy savings after Auburn residents voted to establish a public power agency in November's general election.

"We feel as a company that travels the world that you have the resources and the interest to do it," said Bob Mount, Power Innovations president and CEO, an Auburn native.

Cayuga County residents spend more than \$500 million a year on energy, money that would be better allocated to improving energy generation and delivery, said David Colegrove, president of the Auburn-Cayuga Development Corporation.

"We're already funding our own energy future, but we're not doing it well," he said.

A-CDC, which was founded 10 months ago to span county and city interests in economic development, decided to attack the problems of escalating energy costs.

"As we delved further into economic development, it became clear that everything we can do that is substantial and new deals with energy," he said.

That's why they teamed up with Power Innovations. Mount said the process of making the community energy-independent would include utilizing alternative sources of energy and leasing power lines from NYSEG for more cost-efficient energy delivery.

He said that while other communities in New York state were discussing their own energy-independence, Cayuga County is best suited for it because of its abundance of alternative energy sources.

"This isn't easy. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it," he said. "There will be a community that does it, and I would like it to be this one."

Power Innovations' proposal is on a five-year time frame. First, the Auburn City Council and Cayuga County Legislature must pass resolutions supporting the project. The resolutions would have to be passed before the end of the year to stay on track.

Mount did not have a total cost to the project or the fee Power Innovations would charge, but about 95 percent of the project would be funded through grants. He thinks they have a shot at substantial funding from the New York Department of Energy.

"If we have a solution to the problem, I'm pretty sure we will have the audience and get the funding," he said. "I feel like the tax base is burdened already."

Residents in the audience seemed receptive to the idea. Dave Smith, general manager at Nucor, said this affords Auburn and the county a unique opportunity to be the first at something.

"A lot of communities are just grasping at straws," he said. "It's not just blind optimism. I think this can happen. We just have to drive it."

Staff writer Liz Hacken can be reached at 253-5311 ext. 267 or elizabeth.hacken@lee.net