

Potential for affordable energy upgrades

By [Jeff Morris](#) on July 22, 2015 in [Lead News](#), [News](#), [Town Government](#)

The message at a press conference in North Salem on Monday was that it is possible to achieve significant energy efficiency improvements in multi-family housing, with the energy savings exceeding the cost of the project and the financing. The question, for Lewisboro Supervisor Peter Parsons and others in attendance is how can such savings be applied in other municipalities?

At Robson House, an intergenerational affordable rental property owned and operated by A-HOME in the North Salem hamlet of Croton Falls, a milestone of sorts was achieved: the first PACE loan to finance energy improvements for affordable housing in New York state. PACE (property assessed clean energy) programs are designed to finance energy efficiency upgrades or renewable energy installations for buildings.

In North Salem, financing made available by Energize NY will allow A-HOME and its residents to reduce their energy bills by 31% annually while making the home considerably more comfortable. There is an A-HOME residence in Lewisboro that could potentially qualify for a similar project. What Parsons would like to know is whether there are wider applications for such financing in town, and perhaps more importantly, is there a simple way to wade through the complex amalgam of associations, organizations, agencies and government programs that make such programs available?

Parsons wishes for coordination

“We need a regional energy coordinator and explainer!” Parsons said. “What makes it harder, in a weird way, is nobody knows which organization exactly does what.” Parsons was referring to something that could be seen as both a blessing and a curse: so many different entities are now eager and willing to help with energy conservation and efficiency that it has become a challenge just to know who they are and what they do.

Monday’s press conference was a perfect example. The event itself was organized jointly by A-HOME, based in Pleasantville, and Energize NY, based in Yorktown Heights. Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino was scheduled to be a featured speaker, but he could not make it and Deputy County Executive Kevin Plunkett spoke in his place. Warren Lucas, supervisor of North Salem, also spoke. Parsons, along with Bedford Supervisor Chris Burdick, were in attendance as board members of Energize NY; also there was Leo Wiegman, mayor of the village of Croton-on-Hudson, who is executive director of Sustainable Westchester, a consortium of local governments to which both Bedford and Lewisboro belong, and on whose board Burdick sits. Sustainable Westchester attempts to “generate equitable and ecologically responsible economic growth through innovative, participatory, and replicable initiatives.” Energize NY, meanwhile, helps homeowners access programs that reduce energy waste and make homes more comfortable, and Energize NY Finance “leverages PACE financing to help commercial and non-profit property owners undertake deep energy improvements.”

Both Energize NY and Sustainable Westchester are members of the Solarize Westchester Team, which “supports our cities, towns and villages in the adoption of solar-friendly processes and helps residents and businesses install solar more easily and at a lower cost.” This solarization initiative is separate from the other energy efficiency and improvement programs that are in place, though it is supported by NYSERDA, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, a state agency that aims to “reduce greenhouse gas emissions, accelerate economic growth, and reduce customer energy bills.”

County’s involvement is key

Though NYSERDA’s project manager was in attendance at the ceremonies, the focus was on The Westchester Project for Affordable Housing and Nonprofits, an alliance whereby Westchester County offers reduced interest rates on financing for Energize NY-approved projects. The county made available \$4 million in qualified energy conservation bonds (QECBs). According to Energize NY’s press release on the A-HOME project, “Utilizing QECBs further reduced the already low interest rate on the financing, making the energy upgrade work even more affordable.” A statement issued by Astorino said, “The A-HOME project is the first of what we hope will be many QECB-funded energy improvement projects which will not only reduce the energy burden on low-income residents, but also help not-for-profit building owners better serve their communities.”

Representing the County Board of Legislators were majority leader Catherine Borgia from District 9, and Wendy Wild, legislative assistant to Lewisboro's own Alan Cole, legislator for District 2, which includes North Salem. Also present, in addition to numerous officials with Energize NY, A-HOME and other organizations, was Kristina Klimovich, director of communications and market research for PACE now, a national PACE advocacy group. In perhaps the day's most ironic illustration of Parsons' call for a coordinator, Klimovich had just discovered that her office in Pleasantville was literally right next door to A-HOME's offices — she had been sitting on the other side of the wall to the organization PACE was helping, without knowing it.

What does all this mean for Lewisboro? Parsons says he knows of at least a couple of potential candidates for financing of energy projects in town, though he is not at liberty to discuss them at this point. But he would like to see something happen, provided the town can weave its way through the interconnected maze of support.