

Aggregation could lower islanders' electric bills

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Without doing much of anything, Nantucket electric consumers could see a five to ten percent reduction in their electric bills thanks to the island's unique energy consumption patterns.

Passed without debate at Annual Town Meeting, article 104 was adopted and allows the town to enter into an agreement with an electric producer to offer a lower and more consistent electric rate.

Ratepayers on the island will not have to do anything to get the lower rates, but are offered multiple opportunities to get out of the program if they so choose.

"The goal is to get a price lower than the basic utility price," said Peter Gromer, CEO of Peregrine Energy Group, which has been hired by the town to help with the aggregation application process. "A lot of cities in the Commonwealth have municipal aggregation now. All of the towns on the Cape have it as well as the Vineyard."

Gromer explained Nantucket's unique consumption pattern makes aggregation especially attractive. Normally, towns join together to use buying power in large numbers to get a lower rate. Nantucket is positioned to do so on its own because the island consumes more power in the summer than in the off-season due to the increase in population and thus con-

sumption.

"Most electricity in New England is produced by burning natural gas," said Gromer. "Because it is also used to heat homes and there is a shortage of pipe lines to deliver it, the price of natural gas- and electricity- goes up in the winter."

Consumers will still receive only one bill from National Grid, which will still charge for delivering electricity and maintaining the infrastructure. The only change will be who provides the power, something National Grid is not in the business of doing anyway, according to Gromer and Peregrine Vice president of programs and communications Marlana Patton.

"There will be two changes on the bill," said Patton. "The line with the electric supplier, usually on page two of your bill, and the rate would change. You still get one bill from National Grid and still have to send in one check. You also still call National Grid if you have an outages or other problems."

Lauren Sinatra, energy and project outreach coordinator in the town's energy office, will work with Peregrine to solicit bids from regional energy producers to see who can offer the best deal for Nantucket.

"Typically they are one or two year contracts," said Sinatra, who explained there are around 10,500 residences and 1,000 businesses eligible for

the program. She added the town, as well as large businesses such as Nantucket Cottage Hospital and Nantucket Island Resorts, enter into similar agreements with producers on their own.

Once the bids are received Sinatra will work with a yet to be appointed selection committee who will choose the best option for Nantucket and present that bid to either Town Administrator Libby Gibson or the selectmen, who will sign off on the final proposal.

Because of regulators at the state level who need to review the bids, the earliest the program could be implemented is the upcoming winter.

"People won't see any difference in their bills until at least March 2017," said Patton.

Prior to that bill going out, consumers would have the chance to opt-out of the program and never be a part of it. In addition if once they become part of the program and decide it does not fit their consumption needs, they could opt-out at anytime and go back to their old billing system.

"Prior to joining you will get a letter in the mail explaining how to opt out and you can fill that out and return it," said Patton. "You can also opt out on line, over the phone or call Lauren at her office and she will opt out for you."