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**Legislative History: The Massachusetts Green Communities Act**

**Objectives:** The town of South Hadley, Massachusetts, businesses and property owners who implement renewable energy technologies are unable to sell excess power back into the local electric grid. The administration at Mount Holyoke College, an undergraduate institution for women founded in 1837, is considering implementing photovoltaic technology as a way to provide the school with cleaner energy and also as an educational resource for the student body. The objective of this legislative history is to outline the Green Communities Program, which is a component of the Green Communities Act of 2008. This program is intended to help communities reach renewable energy goals (see “Green Communities Program is Launched”). The legislation also “makes it possible for people who own wind turbines and solar-generated power to sell their excess electricity into the grid (“net-metering”) at favorable rates, for installations of up to 2 megawatts (upfrom 60 kilowatts currently).”11 This rebate could potentially make the project financially feasible for the college. This paper will help to outline the history of Massachusetts’ Green Communities Act and finally propose a plan for Mount Holyoke College to move forward with this project.

**Legislative History**

March 20th, 2007 --

The Green Communities Act, originally the Clean Energy Bill1, was introduced as legislation by House Speaker Salvatore F. DeMasi on March 20th, 2007. The bill would essentially provide a broader infrastructure of support for an increased implementation of renewable energy in the state of Massachusetts6. The idea for the bill, which DeMasi coauthored with Rep. Dan Bosley7, came from the fact that New England states like Massachusetts derive 60% of their energy from natural gas and oil. DeMasi argues that Massachusetts has become “highly susceptible to market fluctuations”, making the cost of electricity unpredictable. DeMasi and Bosley intended to solve this with their innovative bill. In its original form, the widely encompassing bill tried to accomplish many things. First, it would work to establish a “Green Communities Program” that would provide assistance to cities and towns in moving towards greener energy. It would also provide grants and loans to clean-energy projects, establish a committee to identify places where clean energy generating facilities could be built. It would require utilities to buy from alternative energy sources and use new technologies, and finally create a biofuels research and development consortium at the University of Massachusetts.8 However, the bill was met with skepticism from environmental groups that worried about how it would mesh with preexisting energy programs. Many, including the Conservation Law Foundation9, feared that the bill would do away with renewable energy incentives (ie tax exemptions) that had existed in the state for decades6. Others, worried that the bill would not go far enough to encourage utilities, which Massachusetts had deregulated years ago4, to use renewable energy sources2.

**November 15th, 2007 --**

After undergoing a major provision that would “require utilities to consider all available power sources when purchasing electricity, and madnates that they purchase the most cost-effective power:” the bill went to the House of Representatives. After the 79 amendments to the bill were discussed, the house unanimously approved the bill in a 151-0 vote. 5 At that point it became clear that the bill would have to wait until the next year to reach the senate.

**June 23rd, 2008 --**

There is a joint conference committee on June 23rd, which modifies the bill. The bill becomes “Act Relative to Green Communities”.10

**June 24th, 2008 --**

An Act Relative to Green Communities (SB 2768) is approved unanimously by the senate.10

**June 26th 2008 --**

The revised Clean Energy Bill that the House had previously passed in 2007 is now “An Act Relative to Green Communities” (HB 3965), and is again approved unanimously by the house.10

**July 2nd, 2008 --**

Green Communities Act Signed by Governor Deval Patrick in a ceremony at the Boston Museum of Science

**April 22nd, 2009 (Earth Day) – Green Communities Program is Launched**

This component of the Act Relative to Green Communities is intended to aid cities and towns across Massachusetts in meeting renewable energy goals. The program is intended to reduce electricity costs, “spur economic activity, and strengthen [the state’s] collective commitment to a clean energy future”, said Patrick3. The program, which offers grants and loans to communities that qualify as “Green Communities” is partly funded by federal recovery funds, incliding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The program also helps communities to facilitate the siting and “permitting **of renewable energy facilities, benchmarking municipal energy use and reducing energy consumption, purchasing fuel-efficient vehicles for municipal fleets, and taking steps to reduce lifecycle energy costs for new commercial, industrial and residential buildings.**” The program is being implemented by four regional coordinators who provide cities and towns with technological information and advice for implementing renewable energy and for becoming a Green Community.

Qualification as one of Massachusetts’ Green Communities is competitive, and cities and towns that apply must meet a strict set criterion in order to be eligible. These criterion, as set forth by the Massachusetts Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs, are as follows:12

**Criterion #1**: Provide as-of-right siting in designated locations for renewable/alternative energy generation, research & development, or manufacturing facilities

**Criterion #2**: Adopted an expedited application and permit process for as-of-right energy facilities

**Criterion #3:** Establish benchmark for energy use and developed a plan to reduce baseline by 20 percent within 5 years

**Criterion #4:** Purchase only fuel-efficient vehicles

**Criterion #5:** Set requirements to minimize life-cycle energy costs for new construction; one way to meet these requirements is to adopt the new Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) Stretch Code2

**Suggestions for Mount Holyoke College and the Town of South Hadley:**

If South Hadley were to take steps towards becoming a Green Community, Mount Holyoke College could potentially receive the funding and technological support to implement photovoltaic technology on campus. The college thus could play an important role in advocating for the Town of South Hadley to take steps to become a Green Community. The first step in this process should be to open up a dialogue between members of South Hadley’s Town Hall and representatives from Mount Holyoke College.

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