

State grant to fund Town Hall energy upgrades



Observer photo by Greg Duggan

A \$12,000 grant will fund new insulation and lighting to make Town Hall more energy efficient.

Changes could reduce electric, gas costs

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By Greg Elias

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Williston has landed a \$12,000 grant that will fund efficiency upgrades at energy-hogging Town Hall.

“We’re ecstatic,” said Kevin Batson, a member of Williston Green Initiatives, a grassroots group that worked with the town to complete the grant application. “That’s a lot of money to get the Town Hall building taken care of.”

Batson credited Building Energy, a Williston-based company, for rushing to complete an energy audit of Town Hall that he said helped win the grant. The audit, released

earlier this year, concluded Williston could save thousands annually by upgrading insulation, lighting and heating systems.

The grant will supplement money already set aside in the 2009-10 municipal budget to pay for energy efficiency work. The town had planned to spend \$15,000 for new lighting and insulation, and \$27,000 for heating and air conditioning upgrades.

The lighting and insulation projects are expected to be completed this summer.

Town Manager Rick McGuire said the grant money would help defray costs. Energy-wasting lighting and porous insulation were among the problems cited in the audit.

The grant “helps us do part of the projects sooner than we would have been able to do otherwise,” McGuire said.

Combined, the grant and municipal expenditures will pay for most of the upgrades recommended by the energy audit.

The audit, done pro bono by Building Energy, recommended efficiency improvements totaling roughly \$65,000. But the audit said those investments would pay for themselves over time by reducing gas and electricity costs. The town spent \$6,000 on natural gas alone in 2007.

Williston’s grant is just one of the 17 energy efficiency projects around the state to receive funding through the Vermont Community Climate Change Program. In all, \$188,000 was doled out in the first round of funding. Another round of grants will be announced in late spring.

The grants require a 10 percent match from towns receiving funding, according to Sabina Haskell, spokeswoman for the Vermont Department of Natural Resources. In Williston’s case, the required local match is \$1,200, a sum easily exceeded by the town’s planned upgrades.

The town could reduce its natural gas bills by 20 percent by installing new insulation and cut an estimated 30 percent off its electric bills by replacing light fixtures, the grant application said. The lighting and insulation upgrades alone could reduce energy costs by nearly \$3,000.

The grant program is funded by the first installment of Vermont’s \$1.8 million, five-year settlement payout agreed to by American Electric Power Corp., the nation’s largest operator of coal-fired power plants. American Electric was sued by a coalition of Northeastern states that alleged that coal power plants in the Midwest were contributing to acid rain and air pollution.