

School district mulls energy savings plan

By Jennett Meriden Russell

In an effort to make the Center Moriches School District more energy efficient, Board of Education members are contemplating making \$1.5 million in energy related upgrades. Those exact upgrades have yet to be determined, but could include a high-tech climate control system and replacing drafty doors and windows in the aging school buildings.

The board has yet to pass a resolution implementing the new upgrades.

"But this is definitely something we want to do," School Board President Joseph W. McHeffey said.

Superintendent Dr. Donald James said the cost of the upgrades is also yet to be determined, but he said no matter the price tag, they will eventually come at no additional cost to taxpayers. Between state aid reimbursements of up to 68 percent and the energy savings the new systems will provide, the upgrades would virtually pay for themselves.

In the spring, the School Board hired ECG Engineering of Smithtown to conduct a survey of the district to determine roughly how much the new energy upgrades might cost. Kendra McQuilton, director of business development for ECG, and David M. Newman, ECG director of operations, spoke to board members during a public meeting on Wednesday. Mr. Newman said the company studied the size of each building in the district in relation to the energy bills for each and that's how the consultants came to the \$1.5 million estimate for renovations.

ECG plans to come back and make more intensive studies and provide in-depth recommendations over the next two months for overhauling the district's energy efficiency requirements. Ms. McQuilton said the entire project could take a year to a year and a half to complete.

Mr. Newman added that the district would not have to make the first payment on the upgrades until one year after all the work is done.

"By that point, you'll already be seeing significant savings," he said.

Mr. Newman also said that the district could see improvements in its energy efficiency by 25 to 50 percent with the upgrades.

Mr. McHeffey pointed out that the district had planned to include some energy upgrades as part of a \$1.2 million bond passed in spring, but said those improvements could be covered under a new energy efficiency bond. That would leave that money for those projects free to be used on other renovations in the district, he said.

"I can think of 10 projects off-hand," Mr. McHeffey said.

In other cost saving measures, Facilities Director Gary Crowell reported that he has struck a deal with Great Eastern Energy of Brooklyn to deliver natural gas to the district for a discount rate of 4 percent per "therm," a unit of heating value equivalent to 100,000 British thermal units.

That is especially good news for the district, as National Grid recently installed \$125,000 worth of gas pipelines into Center Moriches schools, which means the school district can now run four out of every five boilers on natural gas.

Mr. Crowell pointed out that natural gas currently costs about half that of oil. Dr. James added that the district could save up to 50 percent on fuel costs this year as a result of changing over to natural gas.

Mr. Crowell said he has also gotten faculty and students on the energy saving bandwagon.

Last year, the district signed up with Energy Curtailment Specialists, Inc., a demand response provider. During high demands on the electrical grid, such as extremely hot days when air conditioners are sucking up power, demand response providers will ask their customers to cut back on power, such as turning off lights, to reduce the drain on the grid.

Center Moriches participated in three energy curtailment events last year, in which every school in the district turned off lights for one hour. In the course of those three hours, the district received \$60,000, or \$20,000 per hour, from Energy Curtailment Spe-



Kendra McQuilton and David Newman of ECG Engineering of Smithtown discuss energy-saving plans for the Center Moriches School District during a Board of Education meeting on Wednesday.

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cialists for its participation.

Mr. Crowell said that he is trying to sign up the district for other energy curtailment events.

In the meantime, the school district has

decided to shut off lights every Friday during lunch hour.

"It could still save the district \$400 to \$500," he said, "and the kids are really into it."