

## Newton's Energy Action Plan gets a public hearing

By **Eric Olson**/ Special To The Tab  
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**A**ccording to Dr. Halina Brown, Professor of Environmental Studies at Clark University and a member of Newton's Citizens Commission on Energy, the world presently uses about 435,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 Btu's of energy, largely by burning fossil fuels. That is enough energy to raise 435 quadrillion (one with 24 zeros) pounds of water by one degree Fahrenheit. Of course a lot of good things come about as a result of all this consumption, including making our homes, dinners and baths comfortably warm. But something else is getting warmed along the way: the earth itself, due to the emissions of climate-changing gases. The other bit of bad news according to a chart Dr. Brown showed to a packed auditorium last Monday night in the Newton Free Library, is that global consumption is going up at about 4 percent a year. Energy use is even rising in Newton, although our population is stable.

The good news is, as Mayor David Cohen told the gathering just before Dr. Brown spoke, that energy efficiency can be both good fiscal policy and good environmental policy. Still, in the light of these enormous global figures and trends, what in the world can little Newton possibly do to help?

It turns out that the answer is most definitely not "nothing", but the something we need to do is going to take some work. A good first step is to take detailed stock of the City's present energy consumption and then prioritize actions that will save the City and its residents both energy and money. Dr. Brown unveiled an Energy Action Plan on Monday that does both- it takes careful stock and also points the way toward savings. The Plan has been incubating for several years in the care of the Newton Energy Commission and Department s of both Public Buildings and of Planning. It was released to the public on Monday in an event sponsored by the League of Women Voters, the Green Decade Coalition, the Public Library, and the City. Brooke Lipsitt, former President of the Board of Alderman, presided.

Key recommendations of the Plan include:

- the hiring of an Energy Officer to replace recently departed Electrical Engineer David Tannozzini. A key role for this new hire will be to help the public sector - our schools, libraries, elected officials, planning and zoning departments and others - lead by example, showcasing creative ways for homeowners and businesses to begin to rein in our consumption of climate-harming and non-renewable fossil-fuels. Given the opportunities already listed in the Plan, this person should be able to save the City substantial sums of energy and money.
- the creation of an Energy Investment Fund. This revolving fund would receive an initial capitalization from the City and would then be used to conduct detailed energy audits of the schools and other municipal buildings, then aggressively address any inefficiencies found. The Energy Officer would be the lead person coordinating these audits and correcting inefficiencies.

- raising the profile of energy efficiency in the City's Site Review process. As Dr. Brown pointed out, there is a glaring gap between what is now known about high-performance building and home design, and what is actually considered acceptable practice in the field. Through the Site Review process, Newton can leverage some control over the energy consumption of new buildings in the city.

Dr. Brown urged that the Plan be understood and supported by more than just the City government that helped bring it to reality. And no wonder, since all public services - from schools to snow plow trucks - are responsible for a mere 2 percent of Newton's total emissions. Driving a more fuel-efficient car may be the single most effective personal action Newton residents can take. Tips on how to improve the energy performance of your home can be obtained from the Green Decade Coalition/Newton, at [kyoto@greendecade.org](mailto:kyoto@greendecade.org). The full Energy Action Plan can be readily downloaded from the City Web site - see the pdf link near the bottom of the Department of Public Buildings page.

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