

Cape Elizabeth Alternative Energy Committee
Minutes: March 25, 2008

Present: Wyman Briggs, Ted Hawkes, Alan Lishness, Ernie MacVane, Peter Ingram
Bill Slack, David Whitten

Absent: Sara Lennon

Guests: Anne Holland, Steve Linnell, Charlie Stephens

Charlie Stephens, a leading expert on sustainable community development, energy efficiency strategies and new technologies spoke to the Committee. He pointed out that while the US has 3% of the world's oil supply, it consumes 25% of the world's oil resources. As a net importer of oil, we are reliant on oil-rich nations whose economies are growing. They are using more and more of the oil they are producing in less and less quantities. He reiterated that we are heading into scarcity and that most resources are under stress. Peak oil is not the only problem; importing oil will also become a problem as other countries start consuming more of it.

Points:

- The more technology you have, the more energy you consume and ultimately the worse off you are
- The amount of energy returned on energy invested for "easy" Middle East oil was 20-25 to 1; for alternative fuels the return is 7-8 to 1.
- Ethanol as a fuel is not the answer. It takes too much energy to produce fuel from corn. It also requires too much of the crop land in the US. "Do you want to eat or drive?" Corn production for ethanol is wrongly subsidized and the subsidies to large producers push people off family farms.
- Hydrogen Fuel may be part of the solution if we get it right, but hydrogen is difficult to handle
- Wave and tidal energy may also be part of the solution on a local, small scale.
- Renewable energy is necessary, but limited
- We will most likely always need liquid fuel for some things (including airplanes)
- We don't have to go that far back to get to sustainable per person energy use-- Charlie suggested that the amount of energy consumed per person in the early 1960s was sustainable.
- The community cannot afford to leave people behind. The happiest societies seem to be the ones where they take care of each other (Sweden and Denmark).

Relocalize the Economy

- Agriculture
 - To demonstrate some of the foolishness of the current situation, he gave the example of St. Lawrence County in New York where food is grown and sold at wholesale prices, then comes back and is purchased at retail prices
 - Local production helps people see full circle effects

- Don't tax agricultural land in food production
- Organic agriculture produces far more per acre than corporate, but not more per dollar of input (and won't until oil prices go through the roof)
- It is going to cost more to bring food in once fuel for transportation becomes too high
- Local food processing is one of the biggest economic opportunities out there

- Local Economic Trading Systems
 - Keep money in the local economy
 - He gave the example of the WIR system in Switzerland which is a highly successful barter system—basically, a big database
 - He pointed out that most insurance and banking does not support the local economy

Suggestions for Cape Elizabeth

- Do the things that will return the greatest amount the fastest, and then put the money you save operationally into the capital pile to invest in more energy efficient things.
- Work collectively on things. Make a network of networks.
- Work to change the rules.
- Help other groups and then they'll help you.
- Do a project focused on the schools because that is where the community comes together
 - Perhaps get local corporate sponsors to fund the project