Fair highlights options for going green

Third annual event showcases ways to curb energy use, reduce costs

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GREENFIELD — As costs for heating oil and gas prices continue to rise, the third annual Franklin County Energy Fair highlighted options for going green.

The Energy Fair returned to the John Zon Community Center on Thursday night, with representatives from several local organizations and businesses offering information on a variety of sustainable options for home heating and cooling, electricity generation and waste reduction, as well as cost-saving programs. Outside, Eversource brought a mobile exhibit to showcase its sustainable energy technology.

Greening Greenfield hosted the event with support from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and the Sustainable Greenfield Implementation Committee.

Both Nancy Hazard of Greening Greenfield and FRCOG's Energy and Environment Program Manager Allison Gage spoke to attendees about the purpose of the Energy Fair, and Gage spent time reviewing the programs available for saving money on home energy infrastructure upgrades. Some of the programs are income-based, offering greater savings for those who qualify within certain income parameters.

Hazard recalled how her interest in sustainability was sparked by a visit to Japan, where she saw a culture of sustainability. One of the biggest points she emphasized to attendees was weatherization, which can protect a home from changing seasons and weather conditions while reducing costs with energy-saving measures.

"I can't say enough about how important weatherization is," Hazard said.

One of these programs is Mass Save, a partnership between Berkshire Gas, Cape Light Compact, Eversource, Liberty, National Grid and Unitil that helps homeowners, businesses and communities make clean energy upgrades. Rebates are available for upgrades like heat pumps, and at the Energy Fair, contractors partnering with Mass Save were able to share what technologies are available for potential customers. Weatherization work is also eligible for rebates, and for an income-eligible household, there could be no cost.

The costs impacting households that are still using heating oil, which has been at a record-setting level this year in Massachusetts, provided a backdrop to this year's Energy Fair. An October data report from the Joint Economic Committee Democrats highlights that there's been a 39% hike in oil prices within Northeastern states, with Massachusetts homes estimated to cost $2,460 to heat by the end of the winter.

Gas prices at the pump are also experiencing above-average prices, with an estimate from AAA placing the average gas price across the U.S. at more than $4 per gallon, and in Massachusetts, the average price is $4.08.

Speaking to the impact of these increases locally was Peter Wingate, energy director at Community Action Pioneer Valley, who detailed the services offered by Community Action, such as fuel assistance and electric efficiency audits.

Wingate said there is usually some panic annually around the return of winter, but this year, there is a "heightened level of concern" because of heating oil prices that many homeowners did not budget for. Amid this concern, Wingate said Community Action has seen more people seeking support than before.

"A minimum delivery could be over $600; it might be $700," Wingate said. "A lot of people just don't have that kind of money."

To help support the community as prices remain high, Wingate said Community Action has its ongoing “Heat Up!” campaign to raise money for community members in need of financial support to cover the costs of heating fuel, electricity and more. He also pointed to the energy efficiency resources Community Action can provide to help keep costs down in future winters, such as weatherization improvements.

One Mass Save partner, Western Mass Heating, Cooling & Plumbing, attended the Energy Fair to highlight some of the options available. Scott Cernak, president and owner, noted that while his company hasn’t seen increased interest in moving toward energy efficient options that would “move the needle,” during economic periods like this with high costs, “they’re going to be more interested than maybe they would have been six month ago.”

Cernak highlighted how technology has evolved “drastically” to allow manufacturers opportunities to update their equipment, like heat pumps, ensuring they can be outfitted to more homes in accordance with the increase in demand seen over the last decade.

When it comes to having an Energy Fair like this one during a time of record costs for consumers, Wingate praised the energy-conscious community in Greenfield, saying he’s “inspired” by people like Hazard who make events like the Energy Fair possible.

For Cernak as a vendor, he said the Energy Fair provides a unique opportunity to network with individual attendees, rather than market at a mass level. Notably, after the 2025 Energy Fair, Cernak said five attendees became customers in pursuit of efficiency upgrades.

“We’ll make more out of that than we will a mass-market commercial that reaches 100,000 people,” Cernak said of the networking opportunities.