

Dim lights, save dough

St. Albans City looks at street illumination

By LEON THOMPSON
Messenger Staff Writer

ST. ALBANS CITY — The City of St. Albans is one of 14 communities statewide that are working with Efficiency Vermont to reduce unnecessary street lighting and upgrade its municipal illumination system.

By signing an agreement with Efficiency Vermont, the city will earn 12 free hours of technical assistance from the organization to develop an LED upgrade project.

During the first phase of the process, Efficiency Vermont will help the city survey its existing lighting, create a streetlight inventory, and prepare a final scope of work and a budget.

The agreement signed between the communities and Efficiency Vermont does not require them to implement and fund their

► See **LIGHTS** on page 12A

projects. Rather, it helps them have a plan in place, for future funding, voter approval, or other considerations.

The first priority in St. Albans City is to establish a street light committee, which Peter DesLauriers, former mayor, has agreed to chair. The city needs five to seven people to serve on the panel, including members of the general public.

“There hasn’t been much interest in this committee, to be quite honest,” said Dominic Cloud, city manager. “The city might have to make some specific calls with some specific requests.”

Cloud said the city would field test its municipal lighting system with meters and decide whether light reduction is possible along some streets.

The city will not imminently

change or replace any of its lights with LED fixtures, because the cost-benefit analysis does not work in the city’s favor at the moment, Cloud said.

However, in the long run, the city could knock 30 percent off its annual light bill of about \$100,000 by implementing a program developed with Efficiency Vermont, according to Cloud.

“There are certain areas of the city where we need a lot of light, but we don’t need that much,” he said. “We could get by with less.”

Some of the components addressed through Efficiency Vermont’s municipal lighting program are: parking lot light levels, visibility, glare, color, and skyglow – the glow that is visible in the night sky above developed areas, which is considered light pollution, because it blocks views of the stars.

Efficiency Vermont started its program with a pair of workshops in Rutland and Burlington in October. About 85 municipal and town officials attended, according to Paul Markowitz, who oversees Efficiency Vermont’s municipal lighting program.

Other participating towns include: Wilmington, West Rutland, Hartland, Dorset, Springfield, Williamstown, Northfield, Wallingford Fire District #1, East Montpelier, Rutland Town, Rockingham Town, Hinesburg, Putney, and Hartford.

“I think that’s great,” Markowitz said. “We were hoping for 10. I’m anticipating more will sign on.”

Those that do are eligible for rebates on LED lamps – anywhere from \$100 to \$300 per lamp – and perhaps stimulus funding through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

“This is a sound investment,” Markowitz said. “Eliminating unnecessary bulbs doesn’t cost anything.”

Cloud and Markowitz said Hartford took the lead on Efficiency Vermont’s municipal lighting project. The Town of Hartford actually encompasses: Hartford Village, Quechee, West Hartford, White River Junction, and Wilder.

The seven-person selectboard supported the project from the



start, "because it just makes sense all around," said Lori Hirshfield, Hartford's planning and development director. Hartford signed its agreement with Efficiency Vermont in April.

In 2008, Hartford officials calculated the town was paying about \$10,000 a month for street lights – about \$122,000 annually. The question: Could Hartford reduce light pollution, electricity consumption, and its utility bill while still ensuring all its towns were adequately lit?

Using the guiding principle that pedestrian safety came first, Hartford developed a plan, through Efficiency Vermont, that revealed the town could flip the switch on about 36 percent of its streetlights. Community members offered input at public forums.

"There were a few concerns about removing lights that were addressed at the community meetings," Hirshfield said. "There also have been a few concerns about specific lights removed that have been addressed on an individual basis."

Hartford has already replaced older-model lights with LEDs and, to date, reached a total savings of about \$64,000, according to Hirshfield.

"It's a win-win," she said.

--- --- ---

Anyone interested in serving on the city's street light committee should contact City Manager Dominic Cloud at 524-1500. Efficiency Vermont has more information listed on its Web site (www.efficiencyvermont.com)