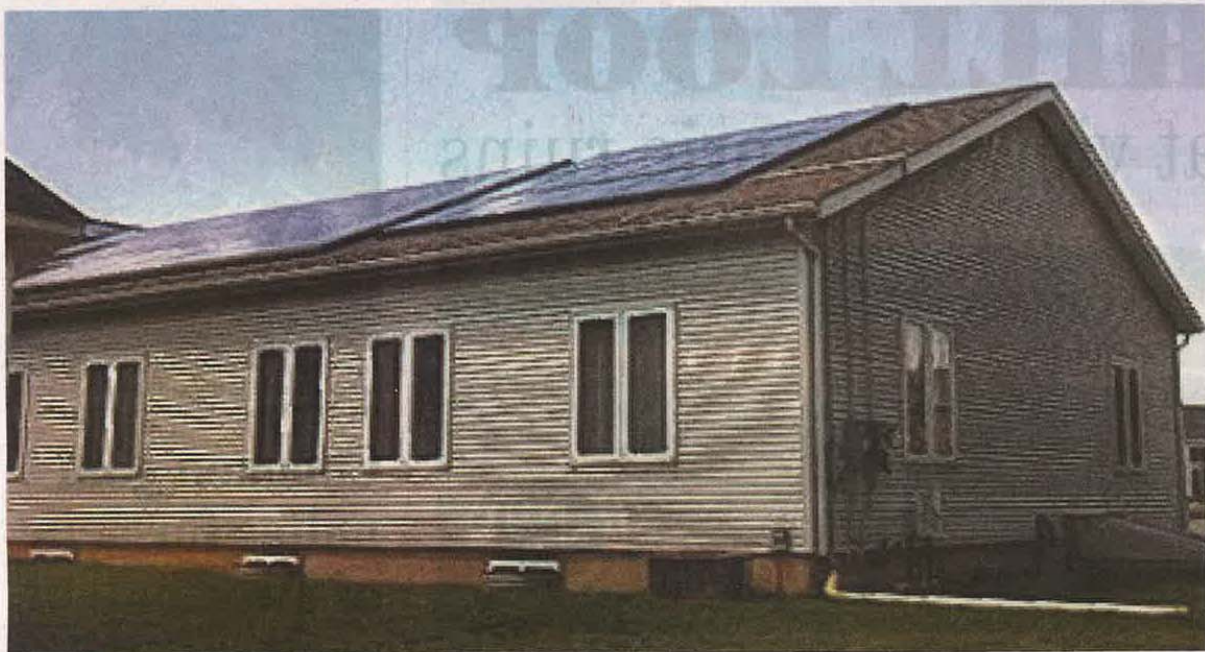


PROTECTING THE VALLEY



The Town of Red Hook's Conservation Advisory Council applied to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority for a grant to put solar panels on Town Hall. COURTESY PHOTO

COUNCIL HELPS RED HOOK BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE

By Marsha Leed

Dutchess County is rich in natural beauty and scenic resources that everyone can enjoy. Many local residents are actively involved in helping protect these assets.



Marsha Leed

Conservation Advisory Councils are volunteer groups formed by municipalities to advise them in the development, management and protection

of their natural resources. Council members are appointed by the local legislative body and work together with other officials. They can be a source of information on environmental issues and promote an increased understanding of these problems.

The Town of Red Hook's Conservation Advisory Council has been active since 1976, with many successes.

The council's main achievement has been its leadership on energy conservation and climate change issues. In 2009, the council applied to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority for funding to install solar panels on Town Hall and received more than \$120,000.

This installation, which was connected to the grid in June 2011, is expected to provide roughly half of the elec-



Bike racks were recently installed by the Town of Red Hook's Conservation Advisory Council. COURTESY PHOTO

tricity needs of Town Hall. In addition, photovoltaic solar panels were installed at the town's recycling center, and the electricity generated is expected to meet all of the center's needs. The town is also having a ground-mount solar panel system installed for the firehouse, which should generate all of its electricity. These photovoltaic installations will generate thousands of dollars worth of electricity for the next 25-30 years for the town.

Photovoltaics, also known as solar panels or PV, convert sunlight into electricity. Solar cells are electrically connected to each other and mounted in a frame to create a photovoltaic module. Multiple modules can be wired together to create an array. PV

systems are sized depending on the building's energy demand. A grid-connected PV system supplements existing electrical service from the utility company, and if the amount of energy generated exceeds the demand, the excess can be exported back to the utility.

The council has been active in numerous other projects. The town participated in the 10 Percent Challenge from 2010-11, a Sustainable Hudson Valley project to get 10 percent energy-use reduction and 10 percent community participation.

Nearly 300 residents and businesses have already joined, and the challenge has become a familiar symbol throughout the community. Now council is moving to-

ward a goal of 20 percent greenhouse gas emission reductions by the year 2020, as set in the Climate Action Plan to be finalized in July 2012. The council is forming implementation teams, including transportation, energy, land/water and waste.

Each year, the council organizes scholarships funded by VFW Post 7765, for two middle school students to be sent to Camp DeBruce, a state Department of Environmental Conservation camp. They support a pilot program for smart meters — real-time energy monitoring in homes. The goal is to get 200 homes in Red Hook to sign up and see if shifting energy demand will lower bills by up to 20 percent.

The council installed bike racks with original art on top toward the goal of marrying public art with functionality.

Conservation advisory committees are always looking for more volunteers. For more information on how to get involved in your local committee, contact your town supervisor, the Environmental Management Council at <http://dutchess-semc.org> or the Cornell Cooperative Extension at <http://ccedutchess.org>.

Marsha Leed is a registered architect, a LEED accredited professional and a member of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council.