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By Angelo Lynn, as seen in the Addison Independent:

<http://www.addisonindependent.com/201709editorial-how-middleburys-cimate...> [1]

A week from Monday, on Sept. 18, residents of the greater-Middlebury area will kick-off a discussion on how to transform our communities to improve energy sustainability, reduce energy costs, and, to quote Jon Copans, “to strengthen the community and model state-of-the-art rural development in an age of climate change.” Copans is Vermont Council of Rural Development’s Program Director and is the guy responsible for bringing this opportunity to Middlebury.

We’ll come back to the grandiose ideas about “modeling state-of-the-art rural development,” but first, here’s what most readers want to know based on the above headline: Will these discussions give you a surefire way to get rich?

Maybe. Depends on how innovative you are, but, honestly, probably not.

But, that doesn’t mean you won’t leave richer.

If, for example, you’ve been on the outside of these issues looking in — but have yet to take advantage of the ways to generate renewable energy, make your homes energy efficient, take advantage of heat-pump technology, or any number of new opportunities — you will certainly leave with ideas to save thousands of dollars every year. And you’ll learn how working as neighborhoods and collective business groups can make renewable energy affordable through cooperatives ventures, so more and more residents can reap the benefits.

As importantly, you’ll be part of a community effort to create an economic vision for the area that is forward-looking.

The potential is real, not only because Vermont communities have embraced the reality of climate change and of the need for renewable energy, but because we are small enough and nimble enough to change — to pivot away from big central power suppliers and create a system where energy is produced closer to home in mini-grids.

Out in front of the effort is Mary Powell, CEO and President of Green Mountain Power. “It is so great to see this momentum build, creating action that will empower and strengthen communities to address climate change,” she said about this program. “Working together there is so much we can accomplish, as we transform our energy system to one that is home, business and community based, and show how Vermont can lead the way.”

Powell is not suggesting that Vermonters abandon all fossil fuels, but what she knows is that the new world of energy will not be based on fossil fuels for much longer, but rather on renewables, and that future power supplies will be more secure (and less susceptible to disruption) if that are de-centralized.

She understands that, in terms of energy, the world is at a turning point. Denmark, Sweden and other European countries are moving toward economies based almost entirely on renewable energy, and progressive American states like California are setting ambitious goals to generate more and more of their energy use through renewables.

The reasons are obvious: renewable energy is sustainable, the price point could soon be compatible with fossil fuels, and, above all, fossil fuels are killing the Earth and renewable energy does not.

What’s not as easy to grasp, is how to position our communities to reap the benefits from this new energy economy?

And that’s what the meeting a week from Monday is all about.

Hosted by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, along with Efficiency Vermont and Green Mountain Power, Middlebury will be the second community in the state to participate in the Climate Economy Model Communities Program. The program’s kick-off event includes afternoon discussions starting at 2:30 and 4:30, a free community pizza dinner provided and sponsored by Green Peppers Restaurant starting at 6 at the Middlebury Union Middle School, followed by evening forums (7 to 8:30 pm). Following this meeting, and over the next two-to-three months, the community will again gather to choose from a list of possible action ideas, and will form task forces to pursue the chosen priorities — priorities that community members and town leaders will pursue over the next few years.

Now, we’ll admit we’re not exactly sure what’s meant by “modeling state-of-the-art rural development,” and how much of that kind of lingo we’ll have to hear on Monday, but if it means coming up with local ways to make hay off this new economy, and if we can create jobs and save citizens money off their fuel bills, and there’s a free pizza dinner and a chance to work together as a community — and catch up with a few folks we haven’t seen for a while — then it sounds like a win-win to me, and anyone who participates will be that much richer.

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