



Larry Cantwell / East Hampton, USA

Town Supervisor who rallied a town to secure its energy future and economy by setting out to go 100% renewable.





INTRODUCTION

Larry Cantwell is the Town Supervisor of East Hampton, a mixed community of baymen and billionaires on Long Island, New York. Cantwell is at the helm as the town embarks on its journey to a sustainable, 100% renewable energy future. The Town Board, energized by community leaders and activists, are taking this bold action following the impact of Superstorm Sandy on East Hampton. Cantwell says [Sandy was the moment his administration realized they had to develop a sustainable energy vision to boost the resilience of their community, help safeguard their local economy and take climate action.](#)

Cantwell was East Hampton's Village Administrator when Sandy struck and he spent countless hours at the emergency operations center with other officials, carefully monitoring the storm's path and managing emergency response. The damage and the aftermath of the storm served as a wakeup call to him and the community at large. "Residential neighborhoods as well as municipal and commercial facilities were badly damaged and there were widespread and lengthy power outages. We experienced severe erosion of our beaches, extensive damage to the coastal landscape and the environment's unique natural resources. It was a critical moment where we realized it was time for this small town to think big," he says.



PROJECT

In 2013, less than one year after Sandy made landfall, the East Hampton Energy Sustainability Committee submitted a Comprehensive Energy Vision to the Town Board calling for deep changes to the existing energy policy by harnessing renewable energy, minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing economic benefits. In 2014, with Cantwell at the helm backed by bipartisan support, the Town Board adopted a transformational goal to meet 100% of the town's energy needs with renewable sources by the year 2020.

“This historic act put East Hampton on the map as the first town on the East Coast to set such an ambitious renewable energy target

and it also led to an ambitious agenda for delivering this bold vision,” says Sylvia Overby, a Town Board member who had urged the energy committee, on which she serves as liaison, to come up with concrete proposals. Immediately, the town's Natural Resources department, the committee, and others began turning the vision into reality by securing state grants.



The outlook is good according to Cantwell. “The town has received more than a dozen clean energy proposals ranging from utility scale solar farms to an offshore wind project. Testing is underway to show how a micro-grid supported by a mix of solar, battery storage, demand management and back-up generators can support critical facilities like the health care center, town hall, our police station, and a water pumping station during normal operation and emergencies such as hurricanes.”



Three large scale solar farms will be installed next year, the monitoring of electricity demand is being improved for efficiency, sites for battery storage are being located, and offshore wind turbines are expected to be installed in the Atlantic Ocean - connected to the island and East Hampton by underground transmission lines.

“We've got the perfect storm of conditions, ambition and expertise to transition to 100% renewable and distributed power,” explains Gordian Raacke, of the local not-for-profit group Renewable Energy Long Island.



RESULTS

The economic benefits of switching to renewable energy sources and reducing wasteful energy consumption practices are expected to be significant. Reducing energy waste by making buildings, air conditioners, appliances and lighting on average 20% more efficient can save local residents and businesses \$12 million in electric bills annually¹.

Supplying the remainder of the electricity from locally generated 100% renewable energy sources like solar and wind would avoid having to purchase costly and price volatile fossil fuels for which the utility currently charges East Hampton customers about \$26 million annually². Cantwell says,

“our electric rates are among the highest in the country, demand is still growing and we don't have enough transmission lines to bring in more power - now renewable energy and battery storage technologies being installed locally and off our shores are cost competitive and can help reduce electricity cost.”

“Generating our own power locally with solar and wind generated electricity while making our homes and businesses more energy efficient just makes sense,” says Margaret Turner, a respected voice of the local business community. “It means that millions of energy dollars will stay in the local economy rather than sending them to the utility companies.”

¹ Annual community wide electric consumption 310,144,000 kwh x \$0.20 x 20% = \$12,405,760

² Remainder of electric consumption: 310,144,000 kwh x 80% = 248,115,200kwh x \$0.105252 power supply charge/kwh = \$26,114,621.

Cantwell believes that shifting to renewable energy will help create employment in town and his view is supported by other key local figures. Frank Dalene of Telemark Inc., a local builder and Building Performance Institute (BPI) Accredited Contractor who spearheaded the committee's recommendation for the 100% renewable energy goal said, "upgrading the energy efficiency of existing buildings, by air sealing, installing better insulation and installing solar or other renewable energy systems, reduces energy consumption and carbon emissions at the same time it creates local jobs for contractors and related trades."

The community will benefit from shifting to 100% renewable energy by becoming more resilient. Cantwell explains, "by harnessing indigenous and locally available energy sources in conjunction with smarter energy infrastructure, the town's power, heating, cooling, water, transportation, communications, medical, emergency assistance and other essential services are more likely to be available during times of extreme weather events, natural disasters or other crisis situations."

Cantwell explains that East Hampton's electricity supply accounts for around half of the town's carbon emissions, so going 100% renewable is a way that the community can take action to tackle climate change and set a benchmark for other towns in the region.

Switching to a 100% renewable electricity supply would save as much CO² as 156,000 acres of U.S. forests would sequester, an area more than three times the land area of the town of East Hampton. Kim Shaw, environmental protection director of the town's Natural Resources department emphasizes the potential benefits for all Americans, "transitioning to a 100% renewable energy supply means drastic reductions in air pollution," she explains.



CONCLUSION

Cantwell says, "a powerful storm, strong leadership and a community with a vision to set course for a clean energy future made this small town think big. Taking ownership of our energy future, rather than letting the utility company make these decision, has already resulted in visible changes and a powerful sense that local leadership and community action will overcome obstacles and turn a bold 100% renewable energy vision into reality."

In public meetings and letters to local papers residents are encouraging the path to 100% renewable energy and are proud to see that their town is leading the way to a clean energy, resilient future. "As elected officials we must represent both the residents of today and those of future generations - and that's what this is all about," explains Town Board member Fred Overton.

To Larry Cantwell, it seems only fitting that East Hampton, the first English settlement in the state of New York, would become the first town in the state to establish a 100% renewable energy goal. "If you look at our town seal you'll see a windmill and a lighthouse. Using renewable energy sources and showing the way to a brighter future has been a tradition here for a long time."

³ Using U.S. EPA CO² conversion <http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/calculator.html#results> for 190,462 MT CO₂e from East Hampton 2010 carbon footprint as per NYIT LI Carbon Footprint data.

⁴ The land area of East Hampton town is 74 sq. miles or 47,360 acres which is 30.3% of the 156,116 acres of U.S. forest carbon sequestration calculated above. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Hampton_\(town\),_New_York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Hampton_(town),_New_York)



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Written by Gordian Raacke, Executive Director for Renewable Energy Long Island

Media Contact

Gordian Raacke

Email: +1 516-313-6611

Phone: Gordian@renewableenergylongisland.org

Other materials

Please find photographs [here](#)