TCL&P sets 100 percent renewables goal
City-owned utility hopes to meet goal by 2040

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TRAVERSE CITY — Wind, solar and landfill gas could power all of Traverse City Light & Power’s customers by 2040 if the utility meets its renewable energy goals.

Utility board members set the target when they adopted a 2018 strategic plan at their meeting Tuesday. It covers a wide range of topics, from maintaining good customer service to improving workflow efficiencies to keeping service reliability at more than 99.97 percent — it's currently at 99.993 percent, TCL&P Operations Manager Daren Dixon said.
It also states the utility intends to get 40 percent of its energy from renewables by 2025, and will strive to push that to 100 percent by 2040, according to the goal. That goes well beyond the city's self-imposed challenge of powering all municipal operations with clean energy by 2020.

"I love this goal," utility board member Ross Hammersley said. "I think it's important and I think it's great to set an aspirational goal ... I think I stated at the last meeting that if it was me personally, I might try to go even more ambitious than this."

The board’s 5-1 vote to adopt the strategic plan, including the goals, drew applause from audience members, a handful of whom spoke in favor of more clean energy.

Kate Madigan, director of the Michigan Climate Action Network, was among them. She helped organize support to make Traverse City the first in the state to take on such a challenge. She enlisted the help of the Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities and Citizens Climate Lobby.

The organizations rounded up 400 signatures for a letter in support of the goal, and a dozen businesses sent positive letters as well, Madigan said.

"It's exciting for the community and the businesses that we're working together to bring this forward, and it's exciting that we have the leadership from our TCL&P board, and the city commission before this, that they show they are really looking at the future for our city and are taking the right steps in that direction," she said.

Other groups pushing for the goal were well-represented at the meeting. NMEAC Co-Chairs Ann Rogers and Greg Reisig both spoke for it. Citizens Climate Lobby Great Lakes Regional Director Elizabeth Dell and volunteers Lisa DelBuono and Bob Eichenlaub pushed for it as well. Each pointed to the benefits of using more clean power — DelBuono, a doctor at Munson Medical Center, talked about the health impacts of burning fossil fuels, for example.

Traverse City Mayor Jim Carruthers, a longtime clean power advocate, also chipped in. He helped bring the first wind generator to Traverse City in the 1990s and put forth the idea of powering all city operations with green energy.

"I'm really looking forward to having our utility come join us and work together with the idea of more power purchases or more power generation of 100 percent renewable energy for all of our citizens and not just the city itself," he said.
The goal also states the utility will meet a new state renewable energy mandate to get 15 percent of its power from "clean and renewable" energy sources by 2021 — Tim Arends, TCL&P’s executive director, said a previous power purchase agreement from a wind project near Saginaw Bay will push the utility over that target.

TCL&P Board Chairperson Pat McGuire cast the lone "no" vote. He's concerned that increasing the renewable energy share to 40 percent would be too expensive. He also asserted that pushing that to 100 percent would be impossible without the advent of new technology. One study suggested the price of power could skyrocket if California tried to switch over to all clean energy, from $50 per megawatt-hour to $1,612.

"You can't do it, people would riot," he said. "So it's just not affordable."

Arends said the utility board will evaluate each clean power purchase to see what impact it would have on rates.

And Madigan said the economics have shifted, so clean energy and energy efficiency now beat other power generation modes on cost in Michigan.

Board member Amy Shamroe said the utility’s contract with existing coal power plants keeps it from meeting the goal sooner. Both plants are set to be offline by 2030, if not sooner.

Arends said he thinks the goals, while aspirational, are achievable.

"The 2040, 100 percent at 2040, that's a long time from now and a lot of questions to answer and find out how the technology evolves, but I certainly feel pretty comfortable with the 40 percent," he said.

**Poll**

Poll: Do you think TC Light & Power will meet its goal of getting 100 percent of its energy from renewables by 2040?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Don't care
City will meet clean power goal