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## State energy plan wins praise in Lewes

By Bruce Pringle  
Staff Writer

Lewes Board of Public Works President Gary Stabley thinks a Delaware task force is correct in advocating an ambitious statewide push to conserve energy.

The Lewes board, Stabley noted Wednesday, has been promoting energy efficiency locally. And a program recommended by the task force, to help property owners make homes and businesses more energy efficient, could add substantial clout to Lewes' effort, he said.

Lewes is one of a handful of Delaware municipalities that supply electricity to their residents.

"We've always said we've got to save electricity," Stabley said. "All of us need to look at ways to conserve energy -- more efficient appliances, more efficient air conditioning and so forth."

The 16-member task force, established 10 months ago by the state legislature, called this week for creation of a nonprofit dedicated to helping consumers, businesses and builders switch to energy-efficient appliances, energy-saving building features and small-scale renewable energy projects.

Officials estimated the approach could save households \$1,000 a year on average.

"Energy costs are too high for our families, and they really hurt our state's economy," said state Sen. Harris McDowell, D-Wilmington, a task force co-

chairman.

Delaware's "Sustainable Energy Utility" wouldn't be the first state-run utility of its type, but it would be the broadest. It would enable homeowners and businesses to buy highly efficient appliances at a discount by paying the price difference between those items and less efficient ones. It also would help low- and moderate-income families install solar and other generating units.

Delaware lawmakers set up the task force after Delmarva Power, the state's primary electricity distributor, raised its rates 59 percent.

Lewes residents fared a little better than most of the state, but still are paying 40 percent more than they did a year ago.

Like Delmarva Power, which operates at a profit, the city-run Lewes operation purchases electricity wholesale from Conectiv Energy.

Lewes' purchase agreement with Conectiv expires at the end of the year, when another rate hike for city residents could become necessary.

"It's not very comforting to see what is happening in the financial markets," Ken Mecham, chairman of the Lewes board, told board members last week.

The board is looking at Delaware Municipal Electric Corp. as a power source that might provide a better deal than Conectiv, and Mecham has indicated that a few suppliers not currently active in Delaware are potential sources.

But officials emphasize that conservation is a key defense against rising energy prices. A nearby state may provide ample evidence of the wisdom of that argument.

In New York, where conservation has been pursued aggressively, average homes use less than half the electricity an average Delaware home uses, according to the University of Delaware's Center for Energy and Environmental Policy.

"That's a pretty big statement right there," said Stabley, the Lewes board president.

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