

BurlCo pitches new energy program to Mount Laurel

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Mount Laurel >>> Energy may become cheaper for residents if council here decides to take part in a program offered by Burlington County.

The county's Government Energy Aggregation program is meant to bring savings to residents by procuring a licensed third-party electrical supplier to provide to energy for those who don't opt out of the program, according to Nicholas Reynolds, chief operating officer of Commercial Utility Consultants, a consulting company hired by the county to oversee the program.

"The program is designed to save the residents of participating municipalities and towns money on the supply portion of their electric bills," he said.

The presentation was only informative at this stage, as council would need to decide via a resolution to join the co-op, but Reynolds was on hand to answer all questions and tout the pros of the programs for residents.

He explained that if Mount Laurel joined the program, residents would still receive bills from PSE&G and that company would still read meters, offer customer service and be the contact in power outages. In 2005, the state deregulated electrical suppliers, allowing people to choose to buy power from another service, not just PSE&G, Reynolds said but that PSE&G buys electric from that supplier on a resident's behalf. He said people can look on the bill and see alternate suppliers and their rates right now. If Mount Laurel joins the program, he said, his company will help the township notify residents before putting the bid out to auction. Whichever supplier comes in the lowest will be selected for the township and residents again will be notified. If they don't want to join in the program, they must opt out, and can do so anytime, Reynolds said. They can also opt in at any time at the auctioned rate, with no penalties for joining or leaving the program, he said.

It was the fact residents would have to opt out that struck a chord with council members Jim Keenan and Linda Bobo. Keenan asked if there was a way residents can chose to opt in, rather than be told they're part of this program and they need to take steps to get out of it.

"I don't like the fact we're telling residents they have to 'opt out,'" he said.

"It would be much more palatable if it weren't an 'opt out' but rather an 'opt in,' program" Bobo said.

Due to state regulations, the program must be an opt out one, Reynolds said, and there was nothing they could do about that. Other concerns from council included price fluctuation, the time it would take for residents who did opt out to actually be out of the program and the timeline presented by the company.

Reynolds said there wouldn't be any price fluctuation, unless the price was lowered through another auction when the contract was up. Those residents who wished not to take part would be out a few days to about a month or so, depending on the time call to opt out came in compared to when their meter gets read, he said. Reynolds had hoped the ordinance would be written and out for second reading by March 9 but Bobo said that is unrealistic.

Even if we decided to do it, we won't hit that (timeline)," she said.

Township Attorney Tyler Prime asked any paperwork on the matter be sent to him and that it will be reviewed and discussed at a future meeting.

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