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### WV cities, residents tap into efficient resources

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Morgantown is leading the charge in saving energy and creating clean initiatives, but a recent study found there are plenty of untapped resources in the city and across West Virginia.

The study, released June 29 by Morgantown-based environmental consulting firm Downstream Strategies, detailed major sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the city, as well as what business owners and residents can do to cut down on both emissions and energy costs.

"We found in Morgantown that there are large opportunities for homeowners and business owners to take matters into their own hands, and to become more energy efficient and install solar systems," said Evan Hansen, president of Downstream Strategies and a researcher behind the study. "These are opportunities that generally will pay for themselves in a short period of time and reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

#### Leading by example

The Downstream Strategies project isn't a new venture for Morgantown, though. Rather, it builds on existing initiatives, including supporting the city's participation in the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, the Morgantown Comprehensive Plan and the Morgantown Planning and Zoning Code.

The City of Morgantown signed the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which came as a response to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in 2007. The Morgantown city manager then established the Morgantown Municipal Green Team, which serves as an advisory committee to help guide public policy, planning and evaluation of energy and environmental affairs within the city.

The Morgantown Comprehensive Plan, released in 2013, recognizes the benefits of setting energy and environmental goals. Building on recommendations from the Green Team, the Comprehensive Plan established Objective 5: Promoting energy conservation and green building.

Since energy saving efforts really took off in Morgantown with the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, Hansen said, "the city and the Green Team have implemented certain actions, (but) didn't systematically look at how far certain types of efforts could get them."

Funded by the Appalachian Stewardship Foundation, Downstream Strategies released the first segment of the three-phase project last year. The most recent report comes as the second phase.

#### Untapped resources

Researchers behind the study found that electricity-related emissions from the commercial and residential sectors were a major source of the cities total greenhouse gas emissions.

The easiest ways to reduce these emissions, the study found, are through energy efficient lighting and programmable thermostats, in addition to installing rooftop solar systems.

"For energy efficiency, the low-hanging fruit is definitely switching to energy efficient lighting," Hansen said.

Although the report focused on Morgantown, Emmett Pepper, executive director of Energy Efficient West Virginia, said cities throughout the state can learn from its example.

"There's a lot of benefits from doing the sort of planning Morgantown is doing, and there's a lot of reasons to make these plans aside from greenhouse gases," Pepper said. "It's a huge amount of money to be saved through what Morgantown is doing."

As noted several times in recent years, but most recently by a WalletHub report, West Virginians pay relatively low electricity rates as compared to the rest of the country, but pay disproportionately high energy bills due to high consumption.

[Click here to download the full report.](#)

While the state's electric utilities, American Electric Power subsidiary Appalachian Power and FirstEnergy's Mon Power and Potomac Edison, offer several programs to promote energy efficiency, many residents are unaware of their options.

Through a survey of 110 respondents from different households within Morgantown city limits between August and October 2014, the researchers also found that only 2 percent of respondents participated in Mon Power's Home Energy Analyzer Program, and none participate in the Low Income Home Check-Up Program.

However, when participants were asked if they would participate in a program designed to help residents reduce their energy costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 71 percent said they would.

But for those who are aware, Hansen said some people just don't want to spend the time on making energy-saving alterations.

"With businesses, the major obstacle is that it takes time," Hansen said. "Business owners are busy running their businesses.

"It's similar with homeowners," he added. "People with families are just busy raising their kids and working their jobs."

Additionally, a lot of people turn away from making the changes due to high capital costs. But the report also found some of the retrofits, such as energy efficient lighting options and programmable thermostats, have a payback period of fewer than three years.

"But some other obstacles are at the state policy level," Hansen said.

To address some of the policy issues, the study recommended the state should adopt various standards,

including an Energy Efficiency Resource Standard and a Renewable Portfolio Standard with a solar carve-out. The state previously enacted an Alternative and Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard in 2010, but it was repealed in 2015.

"As compared to other states, there aren't as many incentive programs out there (in West Virginia) to help people install solar or become more efficient," Hansen added.

The study also recommended the state Department of Environmental Protection develop an "all-of-the-above" strategy to comply with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed Clean Power Plan.

However, under a law passed during the 2015 legislative session, the Legislature has to approve any plan the DEP submits to the EPA — and the state's lawmakers have stood firmly in their fight against the proposal.

So, some cities and communities are finding ways to take matters into their own hands.

#### **Working together**

While Morgantown is at the forefront of creating energy savings initiatives, it isn't alone in the energy-efficient endeavor.

Fayetteville, Oak Hill and Shepherdstown also signed onto the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement; Williamson has developed a local energy action plan; and a few cities, including Huntington, Clarksburg, Beckley, Martinsburg and Wheeling, as well as Morgantown, have made investments to improve energy efficiency of their facilities through performance contracts with energy service companies.

But other cities are relying on their residents to take the reins.

Charleston, for example, isn't working on any initiatives on its own, but has made strides in clean energy with the help of the community.

Like Morgantown, Wheeling and communities in Monroe and Fayette counties, Charleston recently formed a solar co-op to help make solar power more affordable with the help of WV SUN to form a solar co-op in Charleston.

"We know that there's been a lot of solar systems installed in West Virginia in the last few years and we've been working to help organize the solar co-op in Morgantown," Hansen said. "We expect to see a lot more homes and businesses running on solar this year and next year."

Additionally, some capital city residents have been able to take part in smaller-scale projects, such as the e4 energy efficiency competition on Charleston's East End.

The competition pits East End blocks against one another to compete for the largest reduction in energy consumed through Appalachian Power's HomeSMART assessments and energy efficiency retrofits. The goal of e4 is to create momentum and education around being a smart energy consumer, thereby creating "a culture of energy conservation."

Pepper said competition organizers are hoping to expand the competition beyond the East End in the future.

"We're hoping to continue to work with them when we expand to citywide this year," Pepper said. "We're still figuring out how we can work together."

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