



Brookline launches renewable energy program with opt-out system

By [Emma R. Murphy](#)
emurphy@wickedlocal.com

Posted Jul 19, 2017 at 12:01 AM Updated at 11:47 AM

Rolling out this month is an optional electricity program for residents and business owners that promotes renewable energy use.

Brookline Green Electricity is a community aggregation program designed to give residents and business owners the opportunity to sign up for one of three plans, which offer different levels of renewable energy at fixed rates for 30 months.

The program takes advantage of a state goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, according to Maria Morelli, a senior planner at Brookline's Department of Planning and Community Development.

The state requires that all energy suppliers provide 12 percent renewable energy in their service, meaning that service provided by Eversource Energy and other suppliers already includes 12 percent renewable energy. Under state law, that 12 percent requirement will go up by 1 percent each year, according to Morelli.

Under Brookline Green Electricity, two plans – Brookline Green and Brookline All Green – go beyond that requirement by providing an additional 25 percent and 100 percent, respectively. Both plans come at rates higher than the current Eversource rates.

How it started

Support for an aggregated program in Brookline picked up in 2015 when Town Meeting members Tommy Vitolo and Carol Oldham brought up two warrant

articles. The first article permitted the Board of Selectmen to pursue an aggregation program, while the second, a resolution, required that program to include a plan offering 25 percent more renewable energy than the state's 12 percent requirement.

Both passed with majority votes.

The issue:

Intended to help meet a state goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Brookline Green Electricity offers three electricity plans with varying levels of renewable energy set at fixed rates for 30 months.

As required by the state, the program automatically enrolls customers in the program's default plan, Brookline Green. Town officials estimate Brookline Green will help the town displace nearly 34 million pounds of polluting carbon dioxide emissions annually.

Users have the ability to switch plans or opt out altogether at any time at no fee. The opt-out system and multiple mailings from Brookline and Eversource has caused some concern and confusion among residents.

According to Vitolo, the state's 12 percent requirement is not enough to meet the 2080 goal, making it important for municipalities like Brookline to offer plans like Brookline Green.

Following Town Meeting, the selectmen's subcommittee, the Climate Action Committee, looked at surveys and other municipalities, and worked with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MAPC, to develop Brookline Green Electricity.

Though intended to encourage users to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by signing up for plans with more renewable energy, Brookline Green Electricity includes those who cannot afford the increase in cost, like seniors and others who are on a fixed or low income.

Brookline Basic offers zero additional renewable energy beyond the state's required 12 percent, but does so at a lower rate than currently offered by Eversource.

"For basic, we wanted something that would be cheap but would beat Eversource's prices," said Morelli.

Before launching a bidding process to find an energy supplier Brookline first had to submit the project to the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, DPU, for review. In May, the DPU approved Brookline Green Electricity.

The opt-out system:

All Eversource customers in Brookline are automatically signed up for the program, with the ability to opt out. This has been a point of concern for some residents who say the opt-out system is unfair, as the default plan, Brookline Green, is more expensive than the service currently provided through Eversource

For Brookline resident Sandra Stotsky, automatically enrolling customers for a more costly plan raises ethical questions.

“That to me was not the right thing to be doing,” she said.

According to Morelli, the opt-out system is required by the state.

“That automatic enrollment was not devised by the town, that’s something the state mandates and there’s good reason for that,” she said.

The state requires the opt-out system because it creates a competitive environment and attracts bidders, according to Morelli.

While Eversource customers are automatically signed up for Brookline Green, residents and business owners who use other energy suppliers are not, but they can switch into the program.

Customers who are automatically signed up for Brookline Green can change plans or opt out altogether and go back to their current program at any time with no additional fee.

As Eversource’s rates change on a six-month period while Brookline Green Electricity’s rates are fixed for 30 months, the ability to switch in and out of the program allows customers to essentially play the market, Morelli said.

Administrative and consulting fees

Brookline secured fixed rates for 30 months by signing a contract with, Dynegy, a separate energy supplier. The town found Dynegy with the help of a broker, Good Energy, who oversaw the bidding process.

Though Dynegy will supply the energy, residents will continue to receive bills from Eversource who will deliver it.

Bills for Brookline Green Electricity will include two fees, which cover an administrative fee of \$0.000025/kilowatt hour for the MAPC, and an aggregation consultant fee of \$0.001/kilowatt hour for Good Energy. Both fees are included in the fixed rates.

Users will be charged the fee for the MAPC for the first 12 months of service only, while the aggregation consultant fee for Good Energy will last the duration of the 30-month contract, according to Morelli.

Trouble notifying customers

Though Brookline Green Electricity has launched for nearly all of Brookline, it is delayed for residents and businesses in Chestnut Hill, due to a mailing oversight by Eversource.

After accepting a bid, municipalities have a week to alert customers of the upcoming change using a formulaic letter approved by the state. The notification, which Eversource distributed, outlined a 30-day period for users to switch plans, or opt out before the program launched.

According to Morelli, the town repeatedly notified Eversource to include Chestnut Hill in the mailing. In light of the mistake, those in Chestnut Hill have until August to opt out or switch plans.

The town will not release data on who has opted out of the program and who has chosen to stay in it until the last 30-day opt-out period ends in August, said Selectman Nancy Heller.