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Windham is taking aim at prestigious sustainability honor

CLAIRE GALVIN

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

WINDHAM/WILLIMANTIC — The Town of Windham may be on its way to receiving the prestigious bronze level of certification from the Sustainable CT program.

Windham is one of only four municipalities registered with Sustainable CT in the area and it could soon be one of the first towns in Connecticut to receive the certification.

Councilors discussed the program and Windham's efforts at a town council meeting last week.

The program is a voluntary certification program.

Municipalities choose Sustainable CT actions, implement them and earn points toward certification.

Examples of Sustainable CT actions include increasing renewable energy sources in municipal buildings, implementing complete streets that accommodate all types of travelers and developing open space plans.

The program aims to recognize forward-thinking, environmentally friendly and healthy communities.

There is no cost for entering the program and joining may also help towns receive grants.

The town council voted to enter the program back in April.

According to Councilor Dawn Niles, it is surprising to earn a bronze certification in the first year of participation.

"We are a thriving community that's looking to build on our equity, promote our well-being and the future of our town," Niles said.

The town also has a fellowship representative, Colleen Dollard, from the Southeastern Connecticut

Council of Governments, who is going through the town's projects to see which qualify for the certification.

Qualified projects aren't exclusively related to energy or the environment.

"People look at this and say it's an energy program, but it's not," Niles said. "The summer reading program that we're doing at the local library counts toward the bronze star."

The program also advocates for healthy, well-informed communities. Summer reading and youth educational programs can foster a healthy community.

One of the tasks Windham needs to do for this certification is to have a meeting with all department heads and committees to discuss the program and sustainable initiatives in town.

The meeting is also open to the public.

The Sustainable CT committee and Sustainable CT staff will be hosting the information session.

The meeting is scheduled for Aug. 9 at 6:30 p.m. in the Windham Town Hall ballroom.

Contact Niles with any questions regarding the event at nilesdawn@yahoo.com.

Energy commission chairperson Jean de Smet said she is not surprised Windham may receive the bronze certification.

"Windham has been working very hard and investing a lot of time and money in sustainable efforts," de Smet said.

De Smet said Sustainable CT is a measuring tool to let the town know it's making progress in the right direction.

The certification submission deadline for 2018 is Aug. 24.

Follow Claire Galvin on Twitter - @CGalvinTC.

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Jean de Smet