

Mansfield keeps planet's health in mind

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MANSFIELD — Over the years, Mansfield officials have been active in their efforts to reduce energy and water usage, as well as being open to educational programs about the Good Earth.

In fact, as Earth Day approaches Monday, the town seems to be a leader in that area.

For example, Mansfield was the first town in eastern Connecticut, and one of the first in the state, to implement a plastic bag ban.

"We have a culture of caring about our planet and making sure it is passed on to future generations," Mansfield Mayor Paul Sha-piro said.

"That's part of our ethos in Mansfield."

The town has several goals related to sustainability in its 10-year plan of conservation and development, also referred to as "Mansfield Tomorrow."

Local officials recently reflected on the sustainability initiatives that are underway in Mansfield.

Town Initiatives

Town officials are applying for certification through Sustainable CT this year, a program administered by the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Through the program, towns are recognized for commitments to sustainability in various areas, including environmental sustainability.

"While we're excited about the Sustainable CT initiative, we're planning to make sustainability a culture in Mansfield," Mansfield Town Manager Derrick Kennedy said.

Aug. 30 is the final submission deadline for Sustainable CT applications.

"The intent of Sustainable CT is for towns to look at how they're doing business in a little bit of a different way," Mansfield Recycling Coordinator Virginia Walton said.

The town is already engaged in several environmentally-friendly initiatives.

In February, the town council approved a plastic bag ban ordinance designed to divert plastic from waterways, with the ban going into effect in September.

Other initiatives include: a rain garden being built at the community center, old cell-phones collected at the community center and shredded paper collected at the transfer station.

School Initiatives

Plans to build a new elementary school involve constructing a net-zero building, an initiative Mansfield Superintendent of Schools Kelly Lyman said has "excited a lot of people."

Net-zero entails a building in which the amount of energy used on an annual basis is roughly equal to the amount of alternative energy generated on site, usually solar energy.

If achieved, the school would be the first net-zero public school in the state.

"We would like it to be a net-zero building or as close to net-zero as current technology would allow," Shapiro said.

A referendum will likely



Penny Chaurette, 3, of Mansfield, doesn't mind holding a handful of earth and earthworms at a Mansfield Library program called 'Learn About Worms.' Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

be held on the new school building project in conjunction with the November election.

During the April 8 town council meeting, Mansfield Middle School teacher Annie Perkins urged Mansfield officials to be a "model for others" and pursue the net-zero school building.

"We owe it to our children and our children's children to be a net-zero school," she said.

Meanwhile, the existing schools are currently doing their part to protect the planet.

Lyman said as few consumables are used as possible in the school dining halls and at least one water bottle filler is in each school, to name some examples.

Events

Several programs are being and have been held in Mansfield to educate residents about how to protect the planet.

Evidence of this was a recent program at the Mansfield Public Library, which earlier this month showed visitors the important role earthworms play in the environment.

The library program was aptly named "Learn About Worms."

With this event, organizers literally brought the

"earth" inside, with visitors — especially young children — enjoying the opportunity for an up-close-and-personal look at the squiggly invertebrates.

Looking ahead, movies about trash are being shown as part of the "Trashy Movie Series" May 28 at 7 p.m. and June 15 at 4:30 p.m. at the Mansfield Public Library.

Meanwhile, residents are encouraged to pick up trash around town during the town's "Rid Litter Day," which is April 27.

The litter can be put out with the trash the following week or dropped off for free at the transfer station on Route 89.

A number of free events are also being held as part of the "Sustainable Land Care Workshop Series."

For information about those events, and to register, visit the community center web-

site, www.mansfieldcc.com. Trash bags and yellow vests are available for "Rid Litter



Local worm farmer Casey Cohen shows what a handful of worms looks like at a Mansfield Library program recently. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

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