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## **Ansonia eyes power grid for municipal, business use**

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**ANSONIA — More than a century ago, Ansonia Copper and Brass paid the nation's first electric bill — \$50.40.** With demand for power overtaking resources and utility costs skyrocketing, the city is seeking to become an electric pioneer once again.

Ansonia announced Tuesday it is poised to become the state's first municipality to create an intra-city micro-power grid, a city-wide power generating system.

A recently passed state law allows for the creation of Energy Improvement Districts that may independently generate and purchase power. The Board of Aldermen is slated to vote on an ordinance next month establishing the city's district, which is expected to be the first of its kind in the state.

"Our city can and will use the opportunities in an Energy Improvement District to help our local economy save money, make money, create jobs, reduce dependence on oil from the Mideast and clean our environment. That is progress at its best," said Mayor James Della Volpe.

Instead of relying on large nuclear, oil, or coal-burning power plants, city businesses and municipal buildings will run on a cluster of smaller, more environmentally friendly power plants, most likely powered primarily by natural gas.

Once the micro-grid is up and running, the businesses and city buildings using that power will rely on the micro-grid for 98 percent of their power, said Guy Warner, CEO of Pareto Energy, a Washington, D.C.-based firm that has been working with the city on its energy use for the past several years. With two systems up and running, the city can expect to have outages only once every 15 years, he said.

The energy is also expected to be cheaper and cleaner, Warner said.

The generators are about the size of half a shipping container, said Warner, and cost between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per kilowatt. For businesses at the Fountain Lake Industrial Park, for instance, Warner estimated a generator somewhere between 400 kilowatts and one megawatt would be needed, costing between \$400,000 and \$1.5 million.

Warner said he expects participating businesses would break even on their investments after 18 months, and be saving money on their utility bills after that.

Individual businesses have yet to sign onto the plan, but Warner said he expects many would be interested once the project gets going. "We anticipate businesses will be eager to join because it's more reliable power at a lower price," he said.

The project is expected to be financed by tax-free bonds underwritten by private investors, although it is also possible bonds could be issued by the state.

The plans currently do not include energy to city residents, but Warner said he sees homes as a natural extension. There is an investor potentially interested in financing a plan to expand the system to residences, Warner said.

"My knowledge of electricity doesn't extend beyond the on/off switch, but I do know what makes good sense. This is it," said state Rep. Linda Gentile, D-Ansonia.

State Sen. Joseph Crisco, D-Woodbridge, said there is "no one quick fix" to the state's energy woes. The state's recently passed law has 41 different components, including grants for people buying newer, more efficient appliances, and expanded sales tax exemptions for energy efficiency.

"We're going to resolve the problem," he said, but added that "half the issue is federal. Hopefully Congress will get their act together."

Ansonia Copper and Brass is seeking to build its own electric generation facility within the walls of its Liberty Street plant. The city has yet to approach the company regarding possible collaboration, but Warner said purchasing energy from the company might be an option.