

## Beaton focuses on more solar, lower energy costs

Solar installations on city apartment buildings and strategies to reduce energy bills top the priorities of new state Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton, who listened to environmental advocates on Tuesday morning and discussed his focus on “energy justice.”

“We need to look at the fiscal realities. A lot of folks are being really pinched right now by the cost of electricity, and we need to look at identifying any and every opportunity to address that price element but at the same time make sure we’re staying on our path to a cleaner and greener energy source along the way,” Beaton said at a roundtable meeting.

Gov. Charlie Baker identified the midyear budget gap at \$765 million Tuesday, and Beaton told the News Service his budget team is working on how the secretariat could contribute toward reducing that deficit.

Beaton told environmentalists Baker has committed to trying to restore environmental programs to 1 percent of the state budget through his term.

Environmentalists cheered Beaton’s emphasis on energy justice, and Bruce Berman of Save the Harbor / Save the Bay said Beaton’s approach toward the advocates was a welcome departure from the last Republican administration, when Gov. Mitt Romney took office.

“They came in and said, ‘Where would you cut?’” Berman said, saying Beaton set “a really great tone.”

Beaton said he hoped to build on the urban parks program and described himself as a rower and avid fly fisherman who has “read ‘Walden’ on the shores of Walden” Pond, hiked Mount Greylock and took his wife on her first date to Nantasket Beach in Hull.

Several environmental advocates said that in addition to energy efficiency and green energy, the state should undertake efforts to adapt to climate change. Beaton said both he and Baker believe “climate change preparedness” should be undertaken in both “coastal and inland areas.”

Ken Kimmell, the former commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection who is now president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the state should play a role in encouraging wind farm development in Nantucket Sound.

The decision by National Grid and Northeast Utilities to cancel their agreements to purchase power from the planned wind farm has put the long-planned offshore Cape Wind project in jeopardy, as Cape Wind has asserted the utilities moves are invalid.

If Cape Wind is unable to recover, “I would make that a top priority to replace that lost energy,” said Kimmell, who suggested

Beaton should “put a plan in action to put those megawatts out to bid.”

“Right now it’s largely going to be a matter of litigation. It’s a contract dispute and it’s not necessarily the place of our administration to weigh into that judicial aspect,” Beaton told the News Service. He said, “That was a very specific project for Cape Wind, so I don’t believe the land will be bid out. We’re going to have to take a step back and look at all the options on off-shore wind going forward.”

Rep. Patricia Haddad, a top Democrat from Somerset, objected to energy legislation filed last year that she said would give too much of an advantage to hydroelectric power imported from Canada. This session, Haddad filed a bill that she said would require utilities to purchase 1,200 megawatts of competitively bid hydropower, which she said is half the amount in last session’s bill, and 1,500 megawatts of competitively bid offshore wind power.

“If we have the opportunity to create a new industry, where we are no longer at the end of the pipeline, then I think we should really look at that very, very carefully before we dismiss it,” Haddad told the News Service in a phone interview. She said offshore wind could boost the South Coast economy even if Cape Wind remains undeveloped and said central Massachusetts is able to handle the technical manufacturing.

Haddad, who said she hadn’t settled on a “magic number” for wind and hydro megawatts, said the bill would aim to streamline the process of siting energy facilities, which she said would “make it easier” but not “less stringent” to site a natural gas pipeline.

Richard Hubbard, president of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, said he is concerned that if a natural gas pipeline is approved to run through lands held in public trust, that will set a precedent and officials would “see the beginning of the unraveling of that public trust.”

Beaton said Hubbard had a “really interesting point,” and said a new pipeline route proposed by Kinder Morgan that would trace existing utilities paths could shade into nearby conservation land, under Kinder Morgan’s proposal.

Ben Hellerstein of Environment Massachusetts expressed concerns with Haddad’s bill that he said would “put ratepayers on the hook for bearing the cost” of a natural gas pipeline. In an email, Hellerstein told the News Service the bill would require the pipeline company to repay ratepayers, said it would “incentivize the conversion of retired coal plants to gas plants,” and praised the offshore wind components while deeming the bill a “big step backwards on global warming.”

“Not everybody can do a windmill in

their backyard, or solar,” Haddad told the News Service. She said areas of Cape Cod and western Massachusetts cannot access natural gas to heat their homes, and said oil heat is more harmful.

Beaton told the News Service his staff is still “digging into the details” of Haddad’s bill, and said, “It has its good points. It has a couple of things that might draw some concern.”

Haddad said her bill does not address net-metering or the siting of onshore wind, which have been contentious issues in prior sessions.

The new secretary, a Shrewsbury Republican and former House member, said he hoped to increase the amount of private, protected land in the state, saying, “Once it’s gone it’s tough to get back.”

Margaret Van Deusen, deputy director and general counsel of the Charles River Watershed Association, asked for a “more rational process” for changes in the designation of public trust lands.

“Every year we see those lands converted or disposed of through legislation that frequently comes at the end of a legislative session, late in the day, and these bills fly through the Legislature,” said Van Deusen, who said the Department of Conservation and Recreation “hasn’t traditionally taken a position” on those bills. She said, “We do have a no-net-loss policy in Massachusetts, but it’s really difficult to try to replace those kinds of public land with anything that is near the equivalent.”

In the final month of his administration, Gov. Deval Patrick signed an executive order mandating executive branch agencies to take into consideration whether a proposal would impact the environment in areas designated environmental justice communities because of their demographic makeup. Beaton told the News Service the Baker administration will retain that order. Michelle Reid has been hired as EEA’s environmental justice coordinator, according to a spokesman.

Baker said during the campaign he would not raise taxes or fees, though he did not block new fees promulgated by the Patrick administration that have raised the cost of visiting a state park or beach.

Clean Water Action Massachusetts State Director Elizabeth Saunders said the state’s toxic chemical program has reduced the use of toxic chemicals and saved businesses money, though she said fees associated with the program have remained at the same level for nearly 25 years and said those fees would be worth “looking at.”

“The law required the fees for that program... be kept in line with inflation,” said Saunders. “They actually haven’t been changed since 1991.”