

CHATHAM County Line

where all voices are heard

www.chathamcountyline.org

Vol. 11, Issue 6

FREE ~ GRATIS

July/August, 2013

FOCUS: Energy

INSIDE:



INVITATION TO A FEAST

Page 9



CREeping JENNY AND
OTHER TINY JEWELS

Page 5

ONLY@CHATHAMCOUNTYLINE.ORG

→ Julian Sereno – He Said She Said

→ Notes from Chatham County and NC Fracking commissions

PROSPERITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Changing the Yardsticks: ENERGY, CAPITAL, AND OUR LOW CARBON FUTURE

by Lyle Estill

The notion of preserving our prosperity is daunting. And depressing. This is true because natural resource depletion, environmental degradation, and population growth seem to overwhelm the critical factors that will underwrite prosperity in the 21st century. Below we consider one of these critical factors — emerging energy technologies. Here we examine why we must recalculate the costs and benefits of energy production and why prosperity in the 21st century will continue slipping away until we get all the costs right.

One of the weaknesses in our current energy paradigm is that we have externalized the true costs of our “prosperity.” That is, we have measured it by using the wrong yardstick. As each generation boasts to have been “more successful” than the one before, we tend to leave out the damage that was done to achieve that success.

In the case of coal, the “cheap electricity” yardstick says we have done exceedingly well. Indeed our prosperity in North Carolina and elsewhere has been powered largely by cheap fossil energy — mainly coal. However we tend to omit the reduced air, water, and soil quality, resulting from both its acquisition, and combustion. Our dependence on coal for “cheap” electricity has loaded our atmosphere with uncomfortably high levels of mercury, carbon dioxide, and sulfur. It has resulted in increased asthma rates, ocean acidification and global warming. When our metrics include these and other externalities we score badly.

In the case of oil, which powers most of North

Carolina’s transportation sector, the same argument holds. Our dependence on “cheap” crude oil has externalized not only the environmental costs of its production and use but has also omitted the security costs associated with its consumption.

We don’t pay the cost of security at the pump. We pay it on April 15th when we mail our tax checks to Uncle Sam. That’s when we pay for our massive military presence in the Middle East. That’s when we pay for the fighter jets that escort crude oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. When we measure our prosperity by one yardstick: the price at the pump, we look very prosperous indeed. But when we measure ourselves by money spent on the military, we don’t do so well. When we add in other externalities especially global warming, the price of petroleum looms large indeed.

**Waste is a human
invention. It doesn’t
exist in nature.**

The same argument holds for that great “carbon free” energy source: nuclear power. For the moment let us set aside both the energy required for uranium extraction, and the probability that global uranium production has peaked. Instead let us focus on the fact the nuclear

industry has successfully externalized its greatest cost: safety. Since the risk of creating electricity from nuclear plants is so high, no private insurer is willing to take all of it on. This means that the true costs gets passed along to the public as provided by the 1957 Price Anderson Act. As such, instead of paying for all of our power consumption with our monthly electric bill, we pay for it when we remit our taxes.

Renewable energy naysayers at this point are quick to play the “natural gas” card. The proven reserves of natural gas available in the United States has dramatically increased in recent years, thanks in part to the development of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and horizontal drilling technologies.

Proponents of natural gas love to point out that at its current quantities, it is “cheap” and abundant and can power our economy for hundreds of years. Natural gas is also a much cleaner burning fuel than coal, or oil, and a wholesale conversion to it in both our electrical generation and transportation fleets could offer dramatic emissions benefits. That would be good news for climate change and good for air quality.

What is frequently left out of the natural gas conversation, and subsequently the cost calculations for this wonderful newly available resource is twofold. First, drinking water can be destroyed through its extraction. Also, the fracking and shipment of natural gas can result in large releases of methane which is 21 times more heat trapping than carbon dioxide and can lead to continued

YARDSTICKS CONTINUED, PAGE 8

Energy efficiency and renewable energy

by Alicia Ravetto

Energy efficiency can be a major enabler of renewable energy. A project that bundles renewable energy with efficiency upgrades offers a far more powerful investment case than one that proposes renewable energy alone.

Before you invest in a renewable energy system for your house, business or institution, make sure you get an energy audit and follow the recommendations that will improve energy efficiency first.

SAVING ENERGY — HOW TO SAVE ENERGY AND MONEY IN YOUR HOUSE

Throughout Durham, volunteers are teaching their neighbors how to save energy. They organize groups, learn basic information and techniques, and “pay it forward” to their neighbors. Clean Energy Durham inspires and supports these volunteers with workshops on saving energy, creating fun and effective neighborhood organizations, and tracking and sharing their successes.

Examples of easy-to-do actions include:

- Adjust the thermostat temperature setting to be lower in winter and higher in summer
- Install a programmable thermostat
- Turn off computers and monitors when not in use
- Turn down the hot water temperature to 120 degrees
- Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes
- Air dry dishes instead of using the dry cycle in the dishwasher
- Verify that the appliances in your house have an Energy Star label
- Plug the electronic equipment in your house, such as TV and DVD players into a multiple plug with



According to the Energy Star website, one CFL can save you \$6 a year and more than \$40 over its lifetime.

on/off switch; turning it off when the electronic equipment are not in use (stand-by mode uses many watts of energy)

- Use compact fluorescent bulbs (CFL) or LED for lighting
- Caulk air leaks around doors and windows

Visit <http://www.eere.energy.gov> to obtain additional information on how to save energy in your house, in your place of work and in your vehicle.

Visit your utility company website for incentives and rebates.

Alicia Ravetto, AIA Leed Fellow, is a Chatham architect specializing in energy efficient designs.

**EN ESPAÑOL,
ATRAS**

Writing from scratch:

The Suitcase by the Side of the Road

By Marjorie Hudson

Subject: Did you lose your luggage?

There’s a cloth suitcase by the side of Morris Road, south side, maybe a quarter mile from 15-501, past Kent View, then maybe 10 yards past the big power line if you’re heading east. Looks like olive green with a green ribbon (I may have that wrong).

The Kitchen Table Writers Workshop gathers for two hours on Tuesday mornings at the Rosemary House B&B in Pittsboro to critique works in progress, eat the delicious cookies provided by our host Debbie, and “write from scratch” — generating new material from prompts.

We get inspired to write about the strangest things.

With the right prompts, memoirists sometimes cross over into fiction. Fiction writers find themselves writing poetry. And everyone has about the best time you can have doing the difficult, messy, dangerous, and exhilarating work of creative writing.

A practiced writer knows she can find inspiration in almost anything. One day in March, one of the writers in the group taught me that even my own chatlist posting could inspire creative writing.

I had posted news on the Chatham Chatlist about finding a suitcase by the side of the road. When one writer arrived early to class one day, she asked about the posting, then she said: “This would be a great writing prompt.”



WRITING CONTINUED, PAGE 9