

Leaders meet to boost area energy industries

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WORCESTER — Looking to repeat the success of the biotech industry in the region, business, higher education and government leaders are now encouraging the growth of “clean energy” businesses such as solar, wind and geothermal in Central Massachusetts.

The Institute for Energy and Sustainability, created with a \$150,000 grant from the state's Clean Energy Center, met yesterday with 100 representatives of related companies to attract clean and renewable energy businesses.

“Today's biggest accomplishment is to brand this city a green business zone,” said Vincent DeVito, an environmental lawyer with the law firm of Bowditch & Dewey and interim institute executive director.

“That's really what it is, but there hasn't been a big marketing effort. One of the things we want to do today is get that message out so companies who want to get into this business start locating here.”

The conference, attracting companies ranging from National Grid to small companies that install solar power, shared

insights on investing in clean technology, and reviewed developments in funding and environmental legislation.

U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, addressing the group at the WPI Life Sciences and Bioengineering Center at Gateway Park, said the region should build on its successes in biotech, life sciences and at Gateway Park to generate economic growth.

"It is in Worcester's, and the state's, environmental and economic interest to invest and develop a clean energy economy," Mr. McGovern said. "Whoever leads the way will enjoy the benefits. I want the clean energy products of tomorrow to be made here, not delivered here."

The possibilities for clean energy jobs cut across solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower and retrofitting buildings to be more energy-efficient, he said.

"Here in Worcester and Central Massachusetts, we are positioned well with intellectual capital at our universities and colleges that can be tapped into," Mr. McGovern said.

"... We need to move aggressively, because in some other city in America, this same event is happening and they are not going to wait for us. Will we seize the moment, or be left behind?"

Ian A. Bowles, state Environment and Energy Secretary, said the federal stimulus program could provide one of the largest sources of funding for clean energy. With higher education and venture capitalists present, the region is at an advantage to create a cluster of clean energy businesses, he said.



Yesterday's conference was similar to one in 1998 that established a collaboration between businesses and the area's educational institutions in support of manufacturing, said Jack Healy, director of the Worcester-based Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership.

"That provided the impetus for Gateway Park and the bioengineering institute at WPI," he said. "This is much bigger, in that we have state participation. I think this does have a lot of potential with respect to making Worcester a leader in green energy and clean technology."

Mr. DeVito said the institute, whose board includes members from area businesses and education institutions, will develop a weatherization program to make older buildings more energy-efficient.

"Federal weatherization funds are now trickling down, and we plan to capture that to do weatherization, neighborhood by neighborhood," he said.

"Another thing we'll do is hold an investor showcase for development-stage companies. We'll bring the (venture capital) companies to Worcester to see what we have here. A lot of the money is still on the sidelines. People are looking for companies to work with. We want to bring those folks together."

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