

# LEO Energy Summit focuses on lack of heating assistance

## Lynn low-income families in jeopardy

LYNN – With winter fast approaching, many low-income Lynn residents are scrambling for heating assistance, but the promise of funding at both state and federal levels is bleak.

Lynn Economic Opportunity (LEO) on Wednesday held an energy summit at LynnArts aimed at bringing together key members of the community to talk about the crisis and strategize on how to address it. The audience included city councilors, bankers, public safety officials, state and non-profit agency representatives, business owners, and representatives for Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy, state Sen. Thomas McGee and U.S. Rep. John F. Tierney.



“This is a very serious situation,” said LEO Executive Director Jack Mogielnicki. “It's gonna be a tough winter.”

According to Mogielnicki, LEO provided home heating assistance last year to 13,000 families at a cost of \$3.2 million. “We just can't do it this year. There isn't enough money to go around and there's no sign more is coming from the State House or from Washington. People will have to go to their churches for help,” he said.

Darlene Gallant, manager of LEO's fuel-assistance program, said federal funding to Lynn was \$184 million in 2011, but only an estimated \$77 million has been budgeted for 2012. State funding for the program was zero for 2010 and 2011, a trend expected to continue into 2012, she said.

Mogielnicki said the skyrocketing price of oil has literally left many Lynn families in the cold. During the 1980s, when oil was 55 cents per gallon, LEO was able to provide each needy family with \$750 in fuel assistance, or what amounts to 3.5 tanks of heating oil. “This year, we will only be providing one tank,” he said, noting chilly apartments have been linked to poor academic performance in schoolchildren.

“If a kid has been up all night shivering and trying to stay warm, he isn't going to be able to pay attention in class the next day,” Mogielnick said. “We spent \$3.2 million last year keeping these families warm, but we only have \$1 million available right now.”

Gallant urged the audience to contact President Barack Obama and their representatives in Congress. Rep. Donald Wong, a Saugus Republican, vowed to bring the matter to the attention of his State House colleagues. “We need to help these families,” he said. “The Northeast is a different animal. It's not like Florida where heating assistance is less an issue.

In Saugus, many homes are heated by propane gas, which is currently over \$4 per gallon. The average price of heating oil in Massachusetts stands at \$3.77 per gallon, more than double the average 2000-2001 price of \$1.49.

Gallant said low-income Lynn families eligible for fuel assistance will receive a maximum benefit of \$675 if heating with oil, and \$285 if using natural gas or electric heat. In contrast, the maximum benefit last year was \$1,050 for oil customers and \$750 for those families using electric or gas.

“This is the first time we are approaching winter without enough funds to get us through February,” said Mogielnicki, noting the \$675 maximum will fill about two-thirds of an average 275-gallon fuel tank.

According to Gallant, most households use 2-3 tanks per winter.

Families in need were urged to contact the Salvation Army, Family and Childrens Services, or Catholic Charities to inquire about the availability of emergency funds. Jim Gorman, a representative of the St. Vincent De Paul Society, told the audience people should contact the church closest to their home, which in Lynn are St. Mary's, Sacred Heart, St. Joseph and St. Pius.

The summit panel included Gallant, LEO Conservation Program Manager Jan Baronian and Lynn Fire Department Fire Prevention Officer Israel Gonzalez. The event was mostly a call to action, asking those in attendance to spread the word about the need for funding and to contact their elected officials such as Gov. Deval Patrick, U.S. Senators John Kerry and Scott Brown, and U.S. Rep. John Tierney. "Call the President. I did," Gallant said.

For more information, call LEO at 781-581-7220.

## PHOTO CAPTIONS



Muriel Clement, a case manager at Greater Lynn Senior Services (GLSS), discusses the lack of fuel-assistance funding with Rep. Donald Wong at Wednesday's Energy Summit sponsored by Lynn Economic Opportunity. Lynn Fire Department fire prevention specialist Israel Gonzalez is in background.

Greater Lynn Senior Services Executive Director Paul Crowley listens intently at Wednesday's Energy Summit sponsored by Lynn Economic Opportunity.



Jim Gorman from the St. Vincent De Paul Society urges those in need of home heating assistance to contact their churches.

Janet Baronian, manager of LEO's conservation program, discusses the importance of home insulation and other methods of cutting the cost of heating.



The Lynn Economic Opportunity (LEO) Energy Summit on Wednesday in downtown Lynn included LEO Executive Director Jack Mogielnicki, LEO conservation program manager Janet Baronian, LEO heating assistance program manager Darlene Gallant, and Lynn Fire Department fire prevention specialist Israel Gonzalez.