

ENERGY ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

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**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**A Sustainability Tale of Two Towns:
Campiglia Marrittima, Tuscany and Somers, NY**

As part of the team that developed the Somers Sustainability Action Plan (if you want to know more please go to www.greensomers.org), I was reflecting on what others are doing around the world to become self-sustainable and deal with the growing climate change. More importantly I wanted to draw some lessons from a town that is over 1,000 years old and a town that is over 200 years old.

About twelve years ago, when we were starting to put our retirement plan into action we bought a home in in Tuscany, Italy in a village called Campiglia Marrittima. The village is actually a castle town located on one of the mountaintops that line the Etruscan Coast of Italy. Campiglia is located south of Pisa and north of Grosseto and opposite the island of Elbe. Our home is in the ancient part of the town and was part of a castle complex. It was the nunnery which we refurbished into a three bedroom home with views of the Mediterranean Sea and the Tuscan countryside. From our first night there until today, our home has served as a retreat from the modern world, an interactive school for our children in how to tolerate, live and grow in a foreign culture and above all to repeat that what we think is so different is so very much the same all over the world.

Let me draw some similarities and differences in living in Campiglia and living in Somers as it is related to sustainability and quality of life.

Campiglia is essentially a walking town. That is because the paths and steps within the castle walls are for the most part only wide enough to accommodate a horse or a small cart. The one road is only wide enough for a very compact car and is one way, from the top of the town to the bottom, where the main castle gate is.

Thus, most folks regardless of age walk everywhere. It is a hilly town and some of the steps and paths are quite steep. That does not seem to bother the many seniors in the town (up to 98 years old) that daily do their shopping in the town square then lug their groceries up to their homes. Most of the population is fit and there is no one visibly obese. Average life expectancy is high because most of the food that is consumed arrives from local farms every day, inclusive of meat and fish. As far as organic, the farms around our town have been organic for over 5,000 years. Similarly, there is very little use of detergents or cleaning products that is not biodegradable.

Most people live in a home similar to ours. The walls are generally three foot thick stone. The only wood used is on the ceiling supporting the roof. The roof technology is made up of two layers of terra cotta tiles. The first layer is made up of flat tiles that are mortared together to provide waterproofing. The second layer consists of curved tiles that allow a layer of air to remain between the two layers. This air acts as a buffer to keep the roof cool in the summer and as insulation in the winter. The stone walls and tiled floors also keep the house cool in the winter. Most families heat the home with a wood (olive wood) burning fireplace. The hot water comes from a 3' by 2' mounted gas heater that only provides hot water on demand. We extended the unit to provide radiant heating under the tiled floors and hot air from mounted radiator fans. Our energy, and water consumption for a typical family is about 1/4 of an American family.

Electricity primarily comes from coal burning plants. The entire region (Tuscany) is on a path to shut down these plants in ten years as they are the single largest polluters in this beautiful land. Originally the plan was to replace them with nuclear power, but after Japan our town and the surrounding towns have been declared denuclearized zones (really) and we are fully committed to alternative energy sources.

To that end, the town put up a large windmill at the highest point of the mountain and far from the old castle towers that we see from the rear of our home. Similarly, the town acquired 40 acres from a retired farmer and put in place an array of solar panels. The result is that one third of the town energy is produced by the town for its inhabitants. This was done in the last two years. The plan is to reach 80% of self-generated electricity and reduce the dependency on the coal burning plants.

The revenue of the town predominately comes from a mineral mine (begun by Etruscans some 4,000 years ago), farming (oil, wine, vegetables), and tourism. We are not a particularly wealthy town, yet we felt that even after 1,000 years we needed to change and address the issue of climate change and rising energy costs.

I guess the lesson learned is that you are never too old to learn and implement new tricks.

Submitted by:

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The Somers Energy Environment Committee is under the auspices of the Town of Somers. Additional information can be found at www.somersny.com or www.greensomers.org