

U.S. funds offer energy help

STIMULUS: Economic Development Council to get \$1 million to help homeowners, businesses upgrade

The Olympian

The federal government is sending \$1 million in economic stimulus money to the Economic Development Council of Thurston County for energy efficiency and weatherization upgrades for homeowners and businesses.

The program will offer technical help to middle-income homeowners and businesses, helping them to find suitable upgrades and learn about tax credits, rebates and other assistance, EDC Executive Director Michael Cade said Monday. The areas of energy improvements could include wall insulation, floorboard insulation, windows and even furnace upgrades, Cade said.

The grant is one of eight statewide distributed by Washington State University's Cooperative Extension. Together they put \$14 million toward private and public projects, helping up to 10,000 homes and businesses and creating hundreds of jobs, according to the office of Gov. Chris Gregoire.

The EDC grant grew out of efforts by the Thurston Climate Action Team, a new nonprofit group that wants to make it easier for people to upgrade their home energy systems. The money is to be used in part to set up neighborhood workshops that help homeowners get home energy audits and learn about weatherization, rebates and tax credits.

The money also is to help connect homeowners with qualified contractors, according to Stewart Henderson, an activist with the action council. Henderson said leaders of the council included county commissioners Karen Valenzuela and Cathy Wolfe; Lacey Mayor Graeme Sackrison; Sam Garst, whose home is a model of how to use renewable energy; and Tom Crawford.

Crawford, who serves on the team's board, said details need to be worked out, but they hope to be up and running sometime in the first six months of 2010.

The action team is trying to promote local projects that reduce emissions that cause global warming. Henderson said the group has worked over several months to build support for the project from political jurisdictions as well as Puget Sound Energy, the Thurston Chamber, and local financial institutions.

The private, nonprofit EDC will administer the new Thurston Community Energy Efficiency Program that is being funded.

"The EDC has a long-standing history of providing technical support for community-based efforts that work to promote a quality and vibrant community. We believe that the partnerships that were developed to create this proposal will result in the success of this community-based energy efficiency program," Cade said in a statement.

The Governor's Office said the other grants going out around the state are to Pioneer Human Services, the Opportunity Council, the City of Ellensburg, the Snohomish County PUD, the Sustainable Living Center, Sustainable Works, and Clark Public Utilities.

An independent review committee chose the projects with a goal of increased energy efficiency in home and small commercial structures, lower utility costs for middle-income people, job creation and retention and leveraging of other money, according to the Governor's Office.

The state Commerce Department has distributed past stimulus grants for weatherization to local organizations including the Community Action Council of

Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties. The Community Action Council received its first share of \$1.27 million in stimulus funds in midsummer and has been retrofitting homes for qualifying low-income homeowners.

Commerce staffers have said that close to 6,940 homes might be upgraded with insulation and other weatherization through March 2012 using the state's earlier weatherization allotment, which ultimately could reach \$59.5 million. Overall, that is expected to generate close to 250 direct jobs per year across the state.