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Stimulus Green Money Available: Lamorinda Gets Organized

By Sophie Braccini



Contra Costa communities met in Orinda to share best practices Photo Sophie Braccini

"Lafayette will be applying for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funding available through the California Energy Commission."

"We anticipate the funding to be used for modifications to the former Lafayette Library," added Allen, "we hope to retrofit the building to make it energy efficient and eventually house the City Offices there."

Moraga has ambitions for its library as well. "We have a full wish list," said Sherbert, "at the library we would like to increase the insulation of the attic and upgrade the heating system." The town's list is quite long, including attic, duct insulation, upgrading of the heating and air conditioning system at the Hacienda, and upgrading lighting at parks and parking lots. Sherbert confesses that the application process is quite complex and that he's been on the hook. "We will have until late November to submit a package, and the money should reach us the first part of next year," he said.

This money allocation is not the only one that communities can apply for. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) is working to assemble a coalition of County-level representatives to develop a competitive proposal for funding from the State Energy Program for a regional building retrofit program. The available pool of funds is approximately \$95M, and ABAG believes their efforts could secure approximately \$10M of the total.

This money would be used for residential energy efficiency programs. "I participated in a 'webinar' on September 29th hosted by ABAG where they described the proposed steps and timelines for the regional project," said Sherbert, "the next scheduled meeting is October 9 where the steering committee will be formed."

Lafayette has an interest in the ABAG program, but City Manager Steve Falk notes its limitations. "Let's manage our expectations," he said, "ABAG represents 11 counties, and so if they receive the \$10M grant, that will be about \$900,000 per County. Divide by the 19 Contra Costa cities, and that would suggest that there will be about \$47,000 per city - which might be enough to retrofit one, two, or at best a few houses."

At a September 24th meeting organized by the non-profit Contra Costa County Climate Leaders, local jurisdictions met to share best practices to take advantage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act; specifically, the stimulus money that is made available to promote energy efficiency.

Danville, Antioch and El Cerrito had large scale projects to discuss, citywide energy retrofits that are likely to have an impact on their bottom lines. These jurisdictions are large enough to get a direct award with a defined amount of money. Smaller communities, such as those in Lamorinda, need to "opt-in" and enter a competitive grant process with defined projects. Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda are working on identifying plans that would qualify.

"The town has indicated that it intends to submit an application for the competitive awards," said Moraga's staff engineer John Sherbert. "The CEC (California Energy Commission) has published 'target' levels of funds available for the town; the target is approximately \$93,000 based on the population." According to Sherbert, the CEC is expected to release the formal program solicitation by mid-October. Monica Pacheco, assistant to the Orinda City Manager, indicated that even if the city intended to compete, no specific project had been chosen.

Lafayette Planning Department intern Sarah Allen confirmed that,

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