

[Click to Print](#)

Dec, 25, 2009

Bellingham gets more funding for energy efficiency projects

SAM TAYLOR / THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Governments in Whatcom County are one step closer to helping families and business owners find money to make their homes and businesses energy efficient.

Gov. Chris Gregoire announced Wednesday, Dec. 23, that the city of Bellingham has been given \$500,000 for energy efficiency projects.

The money will go toward a revolving loan fund totaling \$1.25 million, which the city, Whatcom County and all six small cities in the county have contributed to, said Alex Ramel, energy and policy manager with Sustainable Connections.

The local governments have partnered with Sustainable Connections and the Opportunity Council to work on energy efficiency projects in the area.

"We're anticipating making Whatcom County a recognized national leader in energy efficiency," Ramel said. "That's part of the goal of this. It's something that city and county leaders have said they're interested in pursuing, and we're working to make it happen."

The government loan fund will be used to partially back loans provided by private banks for conservation projects, Ramel said. The point is to provide some incentive for private investment in such projects.

The fund would cover first losses on a portfolio of loans, he said. If there are substantial losses in excess of 10 percent on the portfolio, the bank is still responsible.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that we preserve the incentive to do good lending practices," he said, to ensure that those receiving loans have adequate credit to pay them back.

The revolving loan fund, which will be bolstered by state money announced by Gregoire and awarded by the state Department of Commerce from federal stimulus funding, is only part of a comprehensive strategy in the county to encourage energy conservation.

Sustainable Connections and the Opportunity Council partnered for the Community Energy Challenge. The goal is to reduce the area's consumption of electricity and natural gas by reducing barriers, including financing; raising awareness; establishing community goals; and creating friendly competition.

To help small businesses and families at all income levels get help, a one-stop shop is being worked on. It would help with energy information, audits to show how homes and buildings are using energy, retrofits to make buildings and equipment more energy efficient, utility rebates, tax credits, contractor services and financing through a revolving loan program.

Reach SAM TAYLOR at sam.taylor@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2263.