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## D.C.-area governments want federal funds for green projects

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Local legislators are making a pitch for millions of dollars for area green projects from the federal economic stimulus plan expected to pass next year, arguing that local governments are the best enactors of the new national climate change agenda.

On behalf of local governments nationwide, a roughly year-old group called **Climate Communities** is asking President-elect Barack Obama to free up \$10 billion nationwide for conservation and energy-efficient block grants and \$18 billion for mass transit improvements.

Of that, the region hopes to tap into new funds to initiate clean energy programs that are on planning books, but don't yet fit into budgets, from a geothermal public safety center in Loudoun County to interest-free loan to retrofit homes in Montgomery County.

"We are on the front lines. We are the first responders," Montgomery County Councilman Roger Berliner, D-District 1, said at a press event on Wednesday sponsored by **Climate Communities** and ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability. "We are the means by which this will get done."

Several local jurisdictions presented their ideas Wednesday. They face stiff competition from stakeholders nationwide shopping for their own slice of the anticipated \$500 billion economic stimulus pie.

In Montgomery County, Berliner discussed a residential energy retrofit program wherein residents can apply for zero-interest loans to make green upgrades to their homes. He is drafting county legislation that would allow these loans to be attached to the homes, even if they're sold to other buyers, through property tax requirements. With a \$5 million loan, he said, homeowners could pay for enough changes to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent, while still pocketing up to \$330 in energy savings each year after the loan is paid off. In all, county officials have said, a \$35 million annual investment would yield \$47 million worth of annual energy savings and 200,000 tons of carbon emission reductions.

Loudoun County expects to see 30 percent energy savings -- resulting in an extra \$14,000 in the bank account -- each year from a planned geothermal fire station in Brambleton. The station, estimated to cost \$7.2 million and would incorporate other green features such as a bioretention pool, premium parking spots for car poolers and hybrid drivers, low-flow shower heads and urinals, ground-source heating pumps and bike racks, is designed to reach the silver level of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design green building standards and recoup the county's investment within three years.

Alexandria is also looking for federal help in building two public safety centers and a new consolidated police headquarters, all at gold levels of the LEED standard, an effort that raises the price tag by roughly \$1.5 million. The city said it would also need \$3 million to retrofit 20 existing government buildings to be more energy efficient, a move that would lower energy consumption by 15 percent and carbon emissions by 2,500 tons. Another major project the city hopes to score is a solar panel installation for a 66,000-square-foot roof on a Business Center Drive building that could help generate 720,000 kilowatt hours of energy and reduce 6,722 metric tons of carbon.

Arlington County said it would use the funds to install solar photovoltaic panels atop its public buildings as part of a \$3 million effort that would slash energy use by 500,000 kilowatt hours a year. County leaders said a federal boost would help them meet their goals of reducing their carbon footprint by 10 percent from 2000 levels. By the end of this year, they will have reached a 3.5 percent reduction.

"It's easy to make targets. Making them happen is really, really hard," said Jay Fiset, a member of the **Arlington County Board**. "We need some help to get the rest of the way."

**Climate Communities**, which is managed by D.C. lobbying firm The Ferguson Group, has included these projects in an overall blueprint request that it has discussed with various members of Congress.

"This isn't the first time they're hearing about it," said Andrea McGimsey, a Board of Supervisors member representing the Potomac district and executive committee member for **Climate Communities**.

The group plans to hand a longer wish list compiled from communities in 18 states to Obama's transition team in February. Arlington, Alexandria, Loudoun County and Montgomery County are the only local jurisdictions with projects included in that list, but council officials from Bladensburg, Bowie, College Park, Rockville, Takoma Park, Prince George's County and Fairfax County have endorsed it. The District, Montgomery County and Loudoun County helped Climate Communities draft the original blueprint.

"These [jurisdictions] have already developed local action plans," said Angela Vincent, northeast regional director for ICLEI USA. "Those projects are ready to go. They're just waiting for the cha-ching from the federal government."