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## Grant's focus is saving energy

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By RUSTY DENNEN

Saving energy, especially during the winter months when electric meters are spinning full-bore, is a challenge for homeowners.

But there's some help on the way.

The George Washington Regional Commission received a \$1 million grant to develop a regional home energy efficiency and conservation pilot program.

The grant, from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, is the largest of 26 Virginia Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants approved by the agency. It was announced on Friday.

The money will be supplemented by another \$453,000 from local sources.

"We have been working hard to advance innovation and green technologies in this area that will stimulate new opportunities and jobs," said Hap Connors, Spotsylvania Supervisor and chairman of the regional Green Government Commission.

"This grant moves us farther along that path. I think it's exciting for the region. It potentially creates a new marketplace, training people to do [energy] audits and retrofits, plus we're instituting green and common-sense energy conservation methods to save people money."

The GW Regional Pilot Home Performance with Energy Star Program will work with utilities to find older homes of moderate- to middle-income residents for home-energy audits and improvements. Those could result in energy savings of up to 20 percent per home.

A training program will be developed to certify local building contractors to do the work.

"Our goal is to generate local green jobs," said Dan Dukes, who chairs the Green Government Commission's green building subcommittee.

Rebates will be offered to upper-middle-income owners of older homes, to invest in energy-saving equipment and conservation measures that qualify for federal tax credits.

In addition, a low-interest revolving-loan program would be established to finance energy-saving improvements.

The pilot program would cover 178 homes in the planning district, which includes Fredericksburg, and the counties of Stafford, Spotsylvania, King George and Caroline.

The primary focus is Caroline, including Port Royal and Bowling Green, King George and the city.

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According to the grant application, approximately 8,400 homes in those jurisdictions are over 10 years old, with owners having incomes between 50 percent and 120 percent of average monthly income.

Another 29,924 homes in Spotsylvania and Stafford counties are in that category. But the plan there is to offer a limited incentive of up to a \$500 rebate to homeowners earning more than 120 percent of average monthly income, who spend \$2,000 or more on energy upgrades.

The Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy estimates that residential energy consumption makes up about 17 percent of the total energy used in Virginia.

George Washington Regional Commission, [gwregion.org](http://gwregion.org) Department of Mines Minerals and Energy, [dmme.virginia.gov](http://dmme.virginia.gov)

Rusty Dennen: 540/374-5431

Email: [rdennen@freelancestar.com](mailto:rdennen@freelancestar.com)

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Virginia's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program will funnel \$16 million to local governments to encourage energy efficiency and renewable-energy initiatives.

The George Washington Regional Commission is receiving \$1 million under the program, which emphasizes a community-based approach to help meet energy and climate-protection goals.

The money comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

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