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GWRC seeking secure telework center

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By KELLY HANNON

Top-secret federal work cannot be done on a laptop at Starbucks.

Employees with security clearances can work only in a secure area, and that usually eliminates the option of teleworking, whether it's from a home office or a standard telework center.

To provide an alternate work site, in case federal employees with security clearances need to work closer to home a few days a week, the George Washington Regional Commission is seeking \$4 million in federal funding to start a local secure telework center.

Located near Quantico Marine Corps Base in Stafford County, the center would be a pilot program open to any federal workers with security clearances.

No staff from the George Washington Regional Commission would ever enter the center. Computer equipment would be installed by the federal government.

A secure facility 40 miles south of Washington would also help with "continuity of operations," according to the commission's letter to Congressman Rob Wittman, outlining the group's interest in hosting a local site.

The General Services Administration operates 14 telework centers in the Washington area, including three locally under the GoTelework.Org brand, in Woodbridge, North Stafford, and Massaponax in Spotsylvania County, with a total of 70 workspaces. The three centers are co-operated by the George Washington Regional Commission.

Nationally, 94,643 federal workers teleworked during 2007, which is 7.6 percent of eligible federal workers.

This was a decline from 110,592 teleworking federal employees in 2006, although higher gas prices may send the number up again when 2008 figures are available.

Few of those employees are doing security clearance work. For instance, the Central Intelligence Agency reported having only 24 teleworkers in 2007, according to a U.S. Office of Personnel Management report. The Department of Homeland Security had 1,310 tele-working employees in 2007, out of 28,865 eligible workers.

The precise number of workers in the Fredericksburg area with security clearances is hard to pinpoint, since they work for private and public employers, but the Greater Washington area employs the most, according to ClearanceJobs.com. The top defense industry job locations requiring security clearances are in Arlington, Chantilly, Fairfax, Reston, and Washington, D.C.

"Given the number of federal facilities and contractors, it's not a surprise that Northern Virginia has the highest concentration of security-cleared professionals in the country," said Evan Lesser, founder and director of ClearanceJobs.com, a Web site devoted to job postings and career advice strictly for those with clearances.

Lesser did not know of any existing telework centers for classified work.

"Any worker with access to classified information is required to work in an office with a facility clearance," Lesser said. "Typically, private sector offices with facility clearance are built or qualified in conjunction with that contractor obtaining federal contracts."

Keith Lesser, telework operations specialist for the George Washington Regional Commission, said local telework centers in Stafford, Spotsylvania and Woodbridge do field calls from federal workers inquiring about secure office space for classified work, but the centers currently do not have that capability. Lesser is not related to Evan Lesser.

The Commission's application says it is coordinating with the offices of Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., and Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va..

For more information on government-run telework centers in the Fredericksburg area, visit gotelework.org.

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