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STORY

Councilman says green practices will take greenbacks [printable version]

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Article published on Wednesday, April 23rd, 2008
By RALPH GIBBS
Mirror Writer

Kermit the Frog isn't the only one singing, "It's not easy being green."

At Tuesday night's City Council work session, councilman Tom Walters, playing devil's advocate, said being environmentally friendly is expensive, and questioned the wisdom of spending millions of tax dollars to make other people rich.

"I looked at one of the best green (homes) in America and it's owned by a millionaire because it took a millionaire to build the thing," Walters said. "The environment is turning out to be a multi-trillion-dollar business. It's not all run from the heart."

He played the role in response to the council's discussion on spending money for a baseline greenhouse emissions inventory and forecast report.

Theresa Peterson, one of the founders of Sustainable Kodiak, a local conservation group and a member of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council, met with the City Council on Earth Day to discuss lowering the city's carbon footprint.

She said the five-step climate protection campaign offered by ICLEI, an international conservation group dedicated to lowering community emissions, said conducting the study is a good way to get that done.

"A common goal of cities that are using this program is a 15 percent (reduction) or more (in carbon emissions) over 10 years," Peterson said.

She said with Kodiak Electrical Association attempting to lower emissions and become 95 percent self-sufficient with renewable energy within 12 years, this program would fit in perfectly.

According to an information package handed out by Peterson, conducting a baseline inventory of global warming pollutants is just the first step in the process, but one of the most important.

The other steps include establishing a lower emission target goal, developing an action plan to reach that goal, implementing that plan and verifying that the plan is working.

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However, without the first step, doing any of the others is more difficult.

During the study, an inventory of and the amount of pollutants produced by both the government and community would be measured for a year. This inventory would provide a baseline study used to help lower city emissions.

Walters was wary of another study.

He said the last study is continuously used against them, especially in the recent fight against putting the new ferry terminal on Near Island.

The document produced in 2002 called the "Community Design Workshop - Final Report" was commissioned in part by city officials to look at ways to improve downtown.

Opponents of the ferry terminal have often referred to the document as a downtown development plan.

"All of a sudden, people are thinking that it is our bible and our plan and we're going to go by that, that it is the official plan," Walters said. "Nobody made that the official plan. I was told if we had all the money in the world, this is what it should look like."

Walters said he's for the idea of lowering greenhouse emissions, but at a reasonable cost.

Peterson countered that was the reason for the emission study. When completed, the study would list all the areas where emissions could be reduced and the council could pick and choose which areas they could reasonably accomplish.

The first step, Peterson said, would be to hire an intern to conduct the study. Peterson said a few groups are willing to help sponsor the study.

"Kodiak College has expressed an interest in perhaps a supervising role, or providing office space," Peterson said. "They've been having conversations with the sustainable program director at the University of Alaska Anchorage and they've expressed interest in giving us money to do this."

The Alaska Marine Conservation Council also said it would be willing to help, she said.

Peterson said the city shouldn't have to go it alone. She will provide the same presentation to the borough and ideally the two governments could work together to offset costs that may be incurred by the study.

In the end, Peterson said, it may not cost the city or borough anything. She estimated the cost of the project would be around \$6,000 and that there are some commitments from the community to donate money.

If those commitments are honored there will be about \$4,000 available.

"There's a lot of detail that still needs to be worked out," Peterson said.

Councilman Jack Maker supports the project and argued that the council need not throw money at every project suggested.

"I don't think anyone is expecting, boom, we got this (plan), let's dump a bunch of money into it," Maker said. "It's a gradual process and

we can look at it.”

He said by developing the plan and following some of the recommendations, the city officials can set an example.

“I don’t see any real negatives, as long as we control it and don’t make it expensive.”

Walters said it needs to be taken slow.

“I would like to proceed a little bit slow (instead of) jump on the star ship, because sometimes the star ship is heading for the sun.”

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