

Cities promote green living

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Government organizations in Northern Nevada have taken the lead in using and promoting renewable energy technology, saving taxpayers money while improving the environment.

The Reno City Council announced a series of environmentally responsible projects Sept. 24. City projects include, photovoltaic, or solar powered, systems for the Downtown Events Center, the Downtown Parking Gallery and the Evelyn Mount Northeast Community Center, said Jason Geddes, environmen-

tal services administrator at the city of Reno.

Many city buildings, already in need of maintenance, Geddes said, will be refitted with energy efficient improvements including air-handling equipment like heaters, ventilators and chillers.

Renewable wind energy will be a priority in the city's plan, Geddes said, with a wind turbine system being planned for City Hall along with other city buildings.

According to Geddes, the approximately \$20 million expense will be paid by a variety of methods that will not result in increased city taxes or fees. The

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, commonly known as the "Stimulus Package," will provide a number of grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

Bonds are another way the city is raising funds. The money saved by upgrades, Geddes said, will pay for the bonds.

The city, Geddes said, hired APS Energy Services to conduct a year-long audit of the city's energy expenditures. APS has guaranteed that the city will save \$880,702 annually from the upgrades.

According to a fact sheet pro-
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Cities — Sierra Club thinks Reno setting example

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vided by Geddes, the amount of greenhouse gas reduction due to upgrades will be equal to removing 1,968 passenger cars from Reno streets.

Geddes said he believes Reno is providing an example for the Northern Nevada area. The city plans to post wind speed and energy savings data online in order to encourage local citizens and businesses to convert to renewable energy sources.

The city is working on a plan, according to Geddes, that would allow public financing for Reno residents who convert to urban turbines. Residents would pay the loan on their property tax bill. If the homeowner sells his or her house, the debt would stay with the property, not the seller.

The project, Geddes said, should be completed by November 2011 with a total of 51 city parks and buildings upgraded to higher energy efficiency standards.

In an effort to address environmental issues in the area,

Washoe County implemented the Washoe County Regional Open Space Program in 1994 to protect Northern Nevada from over development.

The program was designed to address concerns about the effect of over development on Washoe County's natural resources such as wildlife, recreation areas, clean air and water, said Bill Whitney, Washoe County Community Development senior planner.

The county introduced a revised plan in 2008 that, according to Whitney, addressed three of the county's resources: natural, cultural and scenic.

The county's management plan document states that it is the County's priority to "assure that natural and cultural resources are protected and sustained." The document added that these resources are "integral to the county's quality of life."

The county, Whitney said, is seeking stimulus funds to upgrade its buildings. Plans are already in process to add pho-

tovoltaic panels to the county building and one county library.

Whitney said the county is aware of the need to conserve energy and implemented a lot of little changes, like switching to energy efficient lighting and reducing water use, to reduce environmental impact. The county, like the city of Reno, is updating its heating and cooling systems to cut back on energy usage.

Whitney said the county has a collection of employees from various departments, dubbed the "Green Team," which discusses environmental issues that concern the area and bring them to the attention of elected officials.

An area of concern to Whitney is the challenge of present regulations and the future of environmental technology. An example, he said, is the electric car.

With automobile companies like Nissan working to establish 100 percent electric cars, he said, consumers will need to install a 220 volt charging station on their property. Currently, getting permits for this is a difficult

and time consuming process. Whitney said he would like to see the county streamline the process so that consumers will not be deterred from purchasing an electric vehicle.

"We, as a society, have to make it as simple as possible for residents," Whitney said regarding residential environmental upgrades.

The county also has held public workshops to introduce wind and solar energy to the public. The county held a meeting about commercial projects and, according to Whitney, more than 200 people attended to learn more about renewable energy. The county held a second workshop for residents and it was packed too, Whitney said.

"There is a public interest in renewable energy," Whitney said.

The Sierra Club is a nonprofit conservation organization that campaigns for environmental issues on the federal and state levels. It also is involved in raising public awareness of green issues

including encouraging residents and businesses to work toward energy independence and increasing their renewable energy portfolio, said Emily Rhodenbaugh, conservation organizer.

In regard to the city's large scale plan, Rhodenbaugh said the city is doing great.

"They are providing a good example," she said.

She said, however, there are other conservation concerns that the city is not addressing, such as water usage in the unincorporated sections of the Reno area.

Both Whitney and Geddes said the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is vital in funding renewable energy sources in Northern Nevada.

According to the Reinvestment Act's Web site, Nevada received \$314 million in funds, creating or preventing the deletion of 5,667 jobs. The funds are being used for a variety of infrastructure related projects including renewable energy and education.