

Arlington creates an energy task force

BY CHRISTY GOODMAN

The Arlington County Board kicked off the new year with a dramatic resolution: to get the county's private sector to reduce harmful greenhouse gases.

At its annual New Year's Day organizational meeting, the board elected Jay Fisette (D) chairman, and Fisette immediately announced the creation of a 28-member Community Energy and Sustainability Task Force. The panel is to make recommendations to the board about how to reduce carbon emissions in the private and commercial sectors.

The task force is the first of its kind in the Washington region, officials said, although several area jurisdictions have taken other measures. Montgomery County, for example, has been buying wind power for years.

Arlington's community energy plan will involve people outside government.

"There are a large number of other stakeholders and members with a particular expertise to help

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us stretch and dig into an issue that is not normally on the plate of a local government," Fisette said.

The task force will build on the Arlington Initiative to Reduce Emissions program, which was initiated in 2007 and focused on reducing the county's emissions by 10 percent by 2012. The county has passed the halfway mark on that goal, officials said.

County facilities emit 4 percent of the community's total emissions. The new community energy plan "is a much different animal," Fisette said, and will focus on the 96 percent of emissions generated by the private sector and transportation.

Clean energy generation, distribution and storage will be discussed by the task force, whose members include people from the business community, residents and others.

Elenor Hodges, executive director of Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, said in an interview, "Those are things people can't do on their own, but they can be part of a community that does it."

Hodges added that she is encouraged that the task force's membership reaches various sectors of the community. "That is where you find things to solve all of our energy issues," she said.

The county is updating its emissions inventory, which catalogues public and private energy use. The inventory is expected to be finished next month.

"Arlington is a dense, transit-oriented community. So much of our energy use and greenhouse gases come from buildings," said John H. Morrill, the county's energy manager.

Between fiscal 2008 and 2009, Arlington reduced 5 percent of emissions from county buildings by installing solar panels and other



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The Arlington County Board's newly elected chairman, Jay Fisette, speaks with longtime county resident Nancy Hyde after the board's organizational meeting, traditionally held on New Year's Day.

er energy-saving measures. Morrill said he expects to see a "robust" difference in energy use once the emissions inventory is complete.

Electricity consumption de-

creased for the first time in 2008, Morrill said, despite Arlington's continued growth. He said the decrease could be because of the economic downturn, but it also could

be attributed to the private sector's becoming more energy aware and efficient.

"There seems to be a groundswell, I know, on the school side, of people who want to make a difference," said Patrick K. Murphy, superintendent of Arlington public schools. Murphy is a member of the task force.

School Board Chairman Sally Baird agreed, saying many independent energy projects going on within the school system could be turned into formalized, system-wide goals.

The energy task force has a \$350,000 budget, funded in part by the county's Fresh Air Fund and one-time carryover funds from the previous fiscal year. The panel has 18 months to do its work.

Fisette served as the board chairman in 2001 and 2005. Chris Zimmerman (D) was elected vice chairman.

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