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City's alternative-fuel fleet flexes its fat

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The power of fat went on display Tuesday as the first hybrid streetcar in North America led a parade of the city's alternative-fuel fleet, some of it running on biodiesel made with grease collected from Savannah restaurants.

City officials did a ceremonial pumping of biodiesel into the streetcar as it sat on its tracks at the east end of River Street.

"It smells like chicken fingers to me," said Alderman Larry Stuber.

Following behind the streetcar were six other vehicles running on biodiesel, ranging from a pumper truck from the water and sewer department to an SUV from the public information department. They run on a mix of 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent petroleum diesel, although the goal is to reach all biodiesel eventually.

Refuel Savannah supplies the fuel. The company collects about 1,000 gallons of waste vegetable oil a week from restaurants on River Street, plus about 20 other eateries around town. The oil is cleaned, filtered and blended with petroleum diesel.

"It's better for the environment because it is made from renewable resources and has lower emissions compared to petroleum diesel," said Jake Hodesh, who, along with his wife, Miriam Hodesh, and their business partner, Brad Baugh, owns Refuel Savannah.

The event, which included several city-owned bicycles and an electric bike, was part of National Climate Action Week, an event put on by **Climate Communities** and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives to encourage federal support for local climate-change-related projects.

Savannah belongs to both national organizations and is aiming to reduce by 15 percent its carbon

footprint - a measure of the planet-warming greenhouse gases the city government emits in the course of doing business - by 2020.

Pedestrians waved to the green and yellow streetcar as it hummed along its rails. The vehicle is expected to go into daily service beginning in early January.

"We want to run it through every conceivable test," said Sean Brandon, the city's director of mobility and parking services.

The refurbished 1930s-era trolley car, originally used in Melbourne, Australia, will offer free rides to its first 40,000 passengers. Then it'll be 50 cents to ride to one end of River Street and back, Brandon said.

The parade ended behind City Hall, where some tourists grumbled about having waited more than an hour for their not-so-green free shuttle, which was delayed by the eco-celebration.

But Thunderbolt resident Walter Magnuson was pleased to see the new streetcar in action.

"I just wish it ran all the way to Thunderbolt," he said.
