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Localities Make a Pitch for Energy-Efficient Projects

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As President-elect [Barack Obama](#) drafts an economic stimulus package that could provide up to \$1 trillion, elected officials from the Washington region combined forces yesterday to pursue support for environmentally friendly public works projects.

County supervisors, council members and civic leaders from across the area urged Obama and Congress not to overlook initiatives that have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while revitalizing the economy.

"We want the president-elect to know that local governments are uniquely positioned to put the president's vision and plan into action," said Ken Brown, executive director of [Climate Communities](#), a national coalition of local governments, a sponsor of the event.

The joint appeal is part of a national effort to get the incoming administration to invest \$10 billion in a newly created Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program and \$18 billion of [Federal Transit Administration](#) money to fund thousands of clean-energy projects that would be easy to jump-start.

One potential opportunity raised yesterday by [Loudoun County](#) Supervisor [Andrea McGimsey](#) (D-Potomac) is the Brambleton public safety center. The planned \$7.2 million, 22,350-square-foot facility would house a county fire and rescue station and sheriff's office. It would use a geothermal system for heat and air conditioning, among other energy-efficient features, resulting in savings of 30 percent a year, or about \$14,000 at the current rate, McGimsey said. The project was one of 22 the county put on a 90-day hold last month because of concerns about funding.

[Arlington County Board](#) member [Jay Fisette](#) (D) told attendees about a plan to install medium- and large-scale rooftop photovoltaic solar panels on county buildings. Fisette said the project, which would cost about \$3 million, would reduce the county's energy use by as much as 500,000 kilowatt hours a year and eliminate tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

"But we don't have the money to fund it," he said.

[Roger Berliner](#) (D-Potomac-Bethesda), a Montgomery County Council member, called on federal authorities to provide money through grants or a revolving fund for local governments to lend to homeowners at zero interest. Homeowners would identify needed energy-efficient upgrades through a home energy audit. The loans, averaging \$5,000, would be repaid over several years as line items on property tax bills. Berliner said that even with the loan repayments, homeowners could save as much as \$230 a year and reduce emissions by 20 percent.

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"These projects are ready to go," said Angela Vincent, Northeast regional director of the nonprofit ICLEI -- Local Governments for Sustainability, the event's other sponsor. "They're just waiting for the cha-ching to make that happen."

One focus of local efforts is geothermal energy. [Montgomery County](#) has four schools with geothermal systems and four in the works. The systems use underground temperatures to heat and cool the buildings, saving money and energy.

Alexandria is designing a geothermal system for its ninth-grade center, Minnie Howard School. Mark Krause, director of facilities for Alexandria schools, said the geothermal unit will replace the school's HVAC system and will go out for bid early next year. Depending on its success, he said, the school system might implement geothermal in at least two other schools.

"We are on the front lines," Berliner said. "We are the first responders. You give us the means, we can find the way."

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