

Chicago: Energy savings program offered to residents

By Janice Neumann, Special to the Tribune

November 2, 2012

Palos Hills residents looking to conserve household energy can save some big bucks through an incentive program offered through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency on Planning.

Megan Visk, field organizer for Energy Impact Illinois, presented information on the program at a recent committee-of-the-whole meeting. The program offers homeowners 70 percent or up to \$1,750 on energy efficiency improvements such as air sealing and insulation.

Energy Impact, a program led by the metropolitan agency, handles paperwork and oversees the jobs. Many customers have seen 30 percent or more reduction in bills through the program, according to the organization.

Upgrades that help homeowners reduce energy consumption by a minimum of 15 percent, offer about \$500 in yearly savings, said Visk.

Any owner of a single-family home, town-house or two- to four-unit building who also receives service from Peoples Gas, North Shore Gas, Nicor Gas or ComEd is eligible.

Visk said her organization also partners with contractors who do in-home assessments for a reduced rate of \$49 to uncover possible ways to conserve energy. Residents can call 1-855-9-IMPACT to be put in touch with a partner contractor. Homeowners willing to invite neighbors for a type of house-party assessment will receive a free-energy assessment, said Visk.

"I'm hoping the city can help me promote this program," said Visk.

Mayor Jerry Bennett said the city will include information about the program on its web site and newsletters and encouraged aldermen to share the information with constituents.

"It's a lot of money for someone thinking of doing it," said Bennett, who chairs the metropolitan agency's regional planning board.

The program is being funded by a \$25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Also, during the meeting, Geralyn Kathan, a volunteer for Food and Water Watch, a Washington non-profit, presented information on an effort to persuade food manufacturers to label genetically-engineered food items. Those foods could "pose risks to conventional agriculture, the environment and human health," according to the organization, which is urging local legislators to co-sponsor state legislation requiring the labeling.

"We're just asking to get it on the ballot so people can make their own choice," said Kathan, who is also a resident.

Bennett said the council would consider a resolution supporting the initiative. "I think everybody appreciates honesty in labeling," Bennett said.

Updates on roadwork were also given by Ald. Frank Williams, who reported the 88th Avenue project is scheduled to be completed in late November.

Future road work could include a complete reconstruction of 99th Street between Roberts Road and 88th Avenue. That local work could cost \$2.5 to \$3 million, with 70 percent coming from federal funds and 30 percent from local sources. The job has been delayed because of the high local cost, said Bennett.

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