

ACCF-R&E-Separate Voting Item

1. Residential Utility Tax

Issue: Should the Residential Utility Tax be repealed?

R&E Recommendation: Repeal the tax; fund initiatives with demonstrable results

Background: In FY08, the County announced a new program to reduce emissions (AIRE or Arlington Initiative to Reduce Emissions). The Civic Federation report specifically recommended against adoption of a new residential utility tax to fund the program, but recommended funding it at a level of \$1 million from the General Fund. .

A year later, we asked the County for the results of the emission reduction program. They have been disappointing, to say the least. Last year, the County was unable to reduce its energy consumption or associated emissions, due to the acquisition/operation of additional buildings and vehicles, and an apparent failure to initiate basic conservation measures.

The County did claim a reduction in emissions from its purchase of wind power. This notional (not actual) reduction offset increases in consumption and emissions from County buildings and vehicles. Purchase of wind energy allows the County to claim an 'energy credit' from the State of Virginia, but does not result in any verifiable reductions in Arlington County. . The purchase of wind power (generated in West Virginia and other out-of state locations) also cost the County an additional \$100,000 a year. Had the County not purchased the wind power energy, the results would have been exactly the same since all power flows to a general grid, and not to specific users.

Recommendation

The R&E Committee supports and encourages County, commercial and residential efforts to reduce energy consumption and emissions. Our current recommendation is to provide \$650,000 in the FY 09 budget for 'Energy efficiency improvements to County facilities.' This is in addition to \$400,000 in other efficiency improvements to be funded from PAYGO.

We believe conservation/emission goals can be more effectively met by an increasing public awareness of the need to do so, as well as substantially higher energy costs, rather than County-funded exhortations.

If the County wishes to reduce consumption and emissions, it might consider the following measures (suggested last year) that are directly under its control:

1. County staff should be challenged to walk or use public transportation rather than County vehicles with a goal of reducing overall vehicle miles by a minimum of 10%. Vehicles account for a substantial portion of greenhouse emissions in

Arlington, and this one step would by far have the greatest results, not to mention cutting fuel and maintenance costs.

2. The County should consider consolidating activities, employees and departments into fewer buildings. The County presently owns or will own 70 buildings, and has services in 21 leased facilities. This comes out to about 37 employees per facility and undoubtedly involves a lot of travel between them.
3. The County should request staff to consolidate or reduce the number of meetings requiring travel. Use e-mail, phone or video-conferencing instead.
4. The County should incorporate a 'Mapquest' feature on the ART and Metro web sites that will enable a prospective rider to easily determine the bus, the route and the time to get to/from a destination
5. The County should encourage contractors to use electric mowers, trimmers and weed whackers, especially around County buildings. If they can use existing outlets, they will reduce their costs as well as emissions. The County should also consider installing outlets on the outside of these buildings which would facilitate this.
6. For the School Board: how many students drive to school? how many parents drive their children to school instead of using the bus? What can be done to encourage more walking to school and taking the bus?
7. The County should issue ART passes to County employees for use with their ID during working hours. No additional costs involved for anyone, and appropriate penalties for scofflaws.

So far as the Committee knows, after due inquiry, the County has implemented few if any of these suggestions.

Impact: Should ACCF Membership choose to retain the residential utility tax, it would add approximately \$900,000 to the current year's budget, as well as sanctioning a \$1.5 million a year tax in perpetuity with few tangible results.