



News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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Somerset County to Offer Energy Audits Grants to Towns, Schools

Somerset County Freeholder Robert Zaborowski has announced the creation of a new Energy Audits Grants Program that will help municipalities and school districts in Somerset County to conduct energy-usage assessments of their various buildings.

“In the coming years, energy conservation and cost containment are going to become increasingly important to our municipalities and school districts,” Freeholder Zaborowski said at a March 31 press conference. “With the budget cuts that are occurring at the state level, it’s doubtful that many towns or schools will be able to make this a priority without some help.”

Somerset County is prepared to offer grants that may be used in conjunction with a similar program that the state Board of Public Utilities will launch later this year, he said.

Under the BPU program, all towns, counties and school districts will be eligible. The BPU pilot program will be funded in the amount of \$1 million, which will allow it to fund approximately 100 applications statewide.

Somerset County plans to fund its own Energy Audits Grants Program in the amount of \$1 million over the next four years, with the money to come from capital funds.

The Board of Freeholders may decide to go through the Somerset County Improvement Authority to bond for the money. The Improvement Authority also might be a source of loans to the towns or school districts later on if they need to borrow money to implement some of the improvements suggested in their energy audits. Towns and schools can get a much lower interest rate than they could individually by financing through the county Improvement Authority.

Only Somerset County’s own 21 municipalities and 19 school districts will be eligible for the county program. The county’s new Energy Council, which was launched in January, will be developing the criteria for the county grants. Applications will be available later this year.

The Energy Council will review the applications and make recommendations to the Freeholders, who will award the grants. This initiative is in line with the goal of one of the Energy Council’s subcommittees, which is to promote the use of energy audits in both the public and private sectors.

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Peter S. Palmer, Freeholder Director * Rick Fontana, Freeholder Deputy Director
Robert Zaborowski, Freeholder * Jack M. Ciattarelli, Freeholder * Patricia L. Walsh, Freeholder
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“Like the BPU program, ours will be on a first-come basis, although there may be a limit set on the number of buildings per application,” Freeholder Zaborowski said. “Priority will be given to the biggest energy-users in any municipality or school district.”

The BPU program will pre-qualify six firms and by using one of those, the towns and school districts will not have to each go through their own bidding process.

The goal of these audits is to give municipalities and school districts some guidance as to what kinds of energy-saving practices would save them money – for instance, installing solar panels, new windows or doors, or energy-efficient lighting.

The audits will show the annual energy costs associated with particular buildings, the cost of suggested improvements, the potential energy and cost savings, and how long it will take to recoup the improvement costs.

The Energy Audits Grants Program is in line with other energy-saving initiatives that Somerset County is already involved in.

The county started its own internal Energy Audit in 2004, which resulted in a number of recommendations that are being implemented, such as replacing lighting fixtures with high-efficiency lighting and adjusting the average building temperature during the winter and summer months.

The county has purchased 37 hybrid electric-gas vehicles for its fleet since launching that program in 2004, and will purchase another two to four this year.

In 2003, the county replaced all of its traffic-signal bulbs with brighter, lower-cost LED lights. This was four years before the federal government adopted the same standard for traffic lights nationwide.

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