

Vermont Regional Commissions Receive County-Specific Grants for Energy Efficiency

Congratulations to Vermont's regional commissions for successfully appealing to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) for American Resource and Recovery Act (ARRA) dollars that in other states were allocated to counties.

When funding from the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) through ARRA was initially announced, no counties in New England states received any money set aside in the legislation for counties. DOE ruled that New England states had no functioning counties to receive or spend funds, so those states, including Vermont, were left out in the cold with respect to county dollars.

Vermont Congressional delegation (Senators Sanders and Leahy, Representative Welch) wrote to U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu asking him to reverse the regulatory decision. In response, DOE established a process for a state's ten most populous counties and "county equivalent" bodies (such as Vermont's regional planning commissions) to seek these funds.

Vermont's first county-specific block grants, awarded in September, went to Caledonia (\$128,900), Orleans (\$115,200), and Franklin (\$195,600) counties. A second round of grants, awarded in early October, went to Windham (\$130,800), Orange (\$115,800), Windsor (\$193,300), Washington (\$254,600), Chittenden (\$195,400), Rutland (\$189,700), and Addison (\$153,700) counties.

Senator Sanders, of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, authored legislation that established the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. The State of Vermont and its cities and towns have already been awarded \$10.3 million in program funds *apart* from the new county dollars. "This funding will support local efforts to tackle our serious energy challenges," said Sanders. "It provides federal recognition of grassroots efforts to cut fossil fuel emissions, improve energy efficiency, and move us toward such sustainable energies as wind, solar, geothermal and biomass."

These allocations to regional commissions are substantial new resources for implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Local officials need to work closely with their regional commissions to determine the best use of this money.

The Vermont Public Service Department and counties through the regional commissions also appealed to DOE for county funding. DOE has provisionally approved the Public Service Department's proposal to funnel \$5.6 million (less \$880,000 appropriated by the Vermont Legislature to regional commissions) to local governments for energy efficiency block grants. This ARRA money will be administered through Vermont's Clean Energy Development Fund. The Public Service Department is presently responding to DOE's last set of unresolved questions about the proposed program. Upon final approval, the Public Service Department will finally provide guidelines for municipalities seeking to apply for that money. The guidelines should be available before the end of the year (*another rash prediction from VLCT*).

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