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Red(uce) Bank environmental initiative to lower emissions

Boro environmental commission seeks partnership with businesses, schools BY KRISTEN DALTON Staff Writer

Thanks in part to a \$21,000 grant, the Red Bank Environmental Commission plans to implement the Red(uce) Bank program to lower vehicle emissions in the borough in 2012.

“We named the program Red(uce) Bank, melding the name of the borough with our goal: to reduce emissions to make Red Bank an easier place to breathe,” said commission chairwoman Laura Bagwell.

The grant comes through the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC).

“We are developing the ‘bank’ aspect of the grant to work with businesses to possibly have a reward program for those who collect points for actions they take to reduce their emissions.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded ANJEC the funding to work with Red Bank and one other town in the state to develop educational programs to reduce vehicle-related greenhouse gas emissions.

The grant covers the cost of ANJEC staff support, outreach materials and workshops available to the borough, with the hope that other municipalities throughout the state can adapt the program.

Though still in the developmental stage, the environmental commission has already looked into launching a website page to keep track of the progress made by various groups participating in the program.

“The website will allow people to input their current vehicle use to provide a baseline, choose a goal they want to attain to reduce their emissions — say, 20 percent — then see the progress toward their goal as they input actions they have taken to reduce emissions,” explained Bagwell.

“For instance, if someone walks, bikes, carpools or combines trips or even forgoes a trip, it could be tracked and their emissions savings would be calculated.”

Bagwell said the website is free of charge as a one-year trial and after that, it would cost \$10 per month to continue the Web page.

“I hope people would continue the behaviors they committed to because of this program,” she said.

At the Jan. 10 meeting, commission member Andres Simonson said he reached out to Red Bank RiverCenter to see if the business alliance would join the campaign, but has yet to hear back.

“The other part of it is to see if we can bring in the business sector to participate in the program,” said Simonson.



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Commission members talked about possibly promoting Red(uce) Bank by giving hats or T-shirts that are sponsored by various businesses to local groups participating in the program.

In addition to the website, the grant would help Red Bank work toward executing the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, whose aim is to increase average fuel efficiency of municipal vehicles, reduce the number of vehicles in the borough, and launch educational campaigns to reduce vehicle idling.

“We will use most of the remaining funds for educational materials. Much of this grant will be educational, to show people how much emissions they produce, and challenging them to reduce those emissions by a goal that they set themselves,” said Bagwell. The Red Bank Environmental Commission will meet on Jan. 24 at 7 p.m. in the council chambers to discuss further plans for implementing the Red(uce) Bank program, whose tentative official kickoff event is schedule for April near Earth Day.

In addition to utilizing the ANJEC grant this year, the commission also is interested in a New Jersey Natural Gas (NJNG) fundraising opportunity that could earn up to \$5,000 for the municipality in three months.

The NJNG Conserve to Preserve Community Rewards Program encourages people affiliated with the borough as well as family, friends and neighbors, to sign up for the online NJNG Conserve to Preserve Dashboard.

The new online tool is available to NJNG customers and provides in-depth information that enables people to track and analyze their energy use to see how their funds are being spent. Customers can even find out how much it costs to run their appliances as well as how much could be saved by upgrading to high-efficiency models.

“You apply to them and they’ll give you a quarter to accumulate points, so you get three months to do it,” said commission member Boris Kofman.

According to the NJNG website, the borough would receive \$5 for each documented customer who signs up and enters the proper referral code. In order for the borough to qualify for payment, at least 20 referrals must be made, while the maximum reward that an organization can receive is \$5,000 plus a \$1,500 bonus.

“There’s low risk, some reward,” said Simonson.

The commission then voted to make the fundraising opportunity another goal for 2012.

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