

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date:	June 3, 2024
Action Required:	Approval of Resolutions
Presenter:	Kristel Riddervold, Director of the Office of Sustainability
Staff Contacts:	Emily Irvine, Climate Program Manager Kristel Riddervold, Director of the Office of Sustainability
Title:	Resolutions to appropriate \$130,713 from the 2024 City Climate Protection Program – Program Support Grant with LEAP (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville's Office of Sustainability is proposing to provide \$130,713 of previously appropriated funds to the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) for support to the Climate Protection Program. The City has partnered with LEAP since its establishment, and this will be the tenth Program Support Grant.

Charlottesville has been involved with climate protection related efforts at the local level for almost 20 years, beginning with the establishment of the Climate Protection Program following the City of Charlottesville's 2006 commitment through the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement to reduce communitywide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This focus and commitment were re-confirmed with the 2019 adoption of GHG emissions reduction goals and the approval of the Charlottesville Community Climate Action Plan in January 2023.

Over 95% of Charlottesville's GHG emissions are associated with non-municipal activities (the three largest sectors are residential buildings, commercial buildings, and transportation), indicating that success and progress in reducing our community's emissions requires participation of the public *and* private sectors. Emissions-reducing actions are also associated with reduced energy usage, lower utility bills, greater comfort, and health benefits. As such, the Climate Protection Program has a focus on increasing the availability, accessibility, affordability, and awareness of programs and resources that support emission-reducing actions within the community. Successful efforts have routinely included an ongoing partnership with the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) through a yearly program support agreement adjusted to the current needs of the City's Climate Protection Program and the Charlottesville community.

LEAP, a Charlottesville-based 501c3 nonprofit, delivers energy efficiency solutions in Virginia to make homes safer, healthier, and more affordable, while also reducing energy usage and mitigating climate change. LEAP's alliance model is a community-based, public-private partnership.

LEAP leverages funding from various sources, including utility programs (e.g., Dominion Energy and

Charlottesville Gas' low-income weatherization programs), grant opportunities, and the City-funded Home Energy Conservation Grant program – and braids them, where possible, to expand the services available to City residents and businesses. LEAP also harnesses the support of local nonprofits and other key stakeholders to increase awareness of relevant programs and educate community members about energy efficiency and renewable energy.

In 2023, LEAP connected residents across the income spectrum with funded energy efficiency service programs and renewable energy programs, including 12 market-rate installations through Solarize Charlottesville and 21 installations through Dominion Energy's Low-Income Solar program. They also insulated 53 homes, installed 56 heat pumps and replaced 37 thermostats in the City, all of which are important home energy savings measures.

2022's Inflation Reduction Act allocated tens of millions of dollars to each state for home energy rebate programs, in addition to tax credits for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations. It is anticipated that Virginia's State-administered rebate program will open in early 2025, underscoring the need to connect City residents to these programs. 2024's proposed Program Support Agreement with LEAP reflects our plans to scale up accessibility for energy programs and services to our community.

Discussion

The proposed grant to LEAP provides ongoing support to the Climate Protection Program and continues the strategy to reduce energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increase cost savings for residents, and contribute to the City's climate policy goals. This year's scope includes a proposal for an expansion of our efforts to scale access to energy efficiency and renewable energy services through the establishment of a Community Energy Resource Hub with the collaboration and involvement of the Community Climate Collaborative (C3). This hub will serve both residents and business owners, helping to navigate the often-complicated maze of incentives and programs through both an online tool and personalized support. The resource hub will be equally co-funded by the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

City staff has closely coordinated with LEAP on the development of this proposal and appreciates the blend of activities aimed at engaging market-rate and low-income households, rental- and owner-occupied properties, new homeowners, and layering outreach on existing and trusted communication channels to reach target demographics. The proposed grant of \$130,713 to LEAP to implement the 2024 Climate Protection Program Support Agreement (attached) during the coming year will be used to support the City's Climate Action Plan and directly responds to various strategies and key action items in the Community Buildings and Energy sector, including:

Strategy: Increase energy efficiency and onsite renewable energy use in existing buildings

- Key Action: Education/Encouragement
- Key Action: Increase participation by low-income households in fully funded programs for energy efficiency improvements and solar energy systems
- Key Action: Identify options for residents in single-family properties, as well as apartments and town-home style housing, and for both owner-occupied and rental units
- Key Action: Develop and identify funding assistance programs designed for mid-income households

- Key Action: Evaluate and increase resource support for commercial buildings

Strategy: Support transition to carbon-free sources and carbon-neutrality for building energy supply

- Key Action: Prioritize transition to electric for the Miscellaneous Heating Fuels that contribute to the Buildings and Energy sector emissions

Strategy: Leverage outside funding sources

- Key Action: Increase participation in funding programs available from Federal and State governments as well as from utility companies

The attached Memorandum of Understanding provides a summary of the purposes of the funds, program parameters desired by the City, and reporting expectations.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

Approval of the Resolutions for the 2024 Climate Protection Program Support Grant aligns directly with the adopted 2023 Climate Action Plan. It also contributes to one of the Strategic Outcome Areas (Climate Action) of the 2023 City Strategic Plan Framework.

Community Engagement

There have been and will continue to be numerous initiatives engaging various community audiences. Utilization of the resources offered through past support agreements and questions that City staff receive from community members seeking resources and information regarding improved energy use speak to community interest in these services. Additionally, public comments received during adoption of the new greenhouse gas reduction goals and development of the Climate Action Plan reflect the need for continued and increased levels of GHG emission reduction and climate adaptation actions. Since the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, we have heard from many community members that support is needed to help people navigate federal funding opportunities.

Budgetary Impact

There is no additional budgetary impact to the City. Funding support for this program would come from previously appropriated funds in the Fiscal Year 2024 adopted operating budget for the Office of Sustainability.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the Resolutions.

Alternatives

If Council chooses not to proceed, other approaches to promote energy efficiency improvements in the residential and non-residential sectors will be examined.

Attachments

1. LEAP PSA Funding Resolution (2024)
2. LEAP PSA Signature Resolution (2024)
3. 2024 CPP PSA MOU
4. 2024 CPP PSA