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## City may seek 'Beacon' recognition

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**By Donna Beth Weilenman**

*Staff Reporter*

Benicia City Council may agree today to let the city participate in the Beacon Award program, which in turn would make Benicia eligible for its honors.

The Institute for Local Government uses the award to recognize cities and counties that have reduced greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption and enacted policies and programs that address climate change and sustainability.

The program is underwritten by utility customers and is administered under the California Public Utilities Commission by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, San Diego Gas and Electric Company, Southern California Edison and Southern California Gas Company, according to information provided by the Institute for Local Government.

To participate, a government agency must adopt a resolution that commits the city or county to the program, designate a contact person, and inventory its greenhouse gas emissions for its agency operations and the community as a whole. The agency must also prepare a climate action plan that addresses the program's "best practice areas," and demonstrate compliance with the California Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989, also called Assembly Bill 939.

Three levels of awards are earnable, including silver, gold and platinum, according to the program's outline.

To earn Silver Beacon recognition, an agency must reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions and increase its energy savings each by five percent. The community's greenhouse gas emissions also must be reduced by five percent, and it must have at least one activity that promotes energy efficiency, as well as at least one activity in each of the 10 'best practice' areas.

To reach Gold Beacon status, greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 10 percent, both by the agency and the community, and energy savings also must increase 10 percent in the participating agency. Two activities promoting energy efficiency must take place in the community, and in each of the 10 best practice areas, two activities must take place.

Platinum Beacon designees must reduce emissions in the participating agency and the community by 20 percent, and boost energy savings by 20 percent. They must demonstrate four activities that promote energy efficiency, and have three activities in each of the 10 best practice areas.

Those 10 areas are energy efficiency and conservation; water and waste water systems; green building; waste reduction and recycling, climate-friendly purchasing; renewable energy and low-carbon fuels; efficient transportation; land use and community design; open space and offsetting carbon emissions; and promoting community and individual action.

Any who receive Beacon Awards will also be recognized by the League of California Cities, as well as the California State Association of Counties events.

The Institute of Local Government is the non-profit research and education affiliate of those organizations. Should a city or county achieve platinum level, the Institute for Local Government may establish a diamond level award.

Charlie Knox, director of the Public Works and Community Development department, said the institute has assured the city it would be accepted into the program once the resolution has been received.

After that, he said, "We will work towards achieving one or more of the three award levels."

There is no deadline or timeline Benicia has to meet in its quest for a Beacon Award, Knox said.

So far, 17 cities and two counties – Sonoma and Yolo – have been recognized under the Beacon program, Knox said. San Rafael became the first participant in September, 2010.

In a related subject on tonight's agenda, the Council will give the public a chance to comment on an amendment to the 2010 California Green Building Standards Code.

The changes would make the state building standards more stringent, requiring certain construction projects to existing residential buildings to conform to specific code provisions, or to require completion of energy efficiency upgrades.

The state green building code, called CALGREEN, became effective Jan. 1, but it also allowed cities to enact even stronger standards. Based on the Community Sustainability Commission's recommendations made last October, the Council is entertaining changes that would apply the standards to most residential room additions of 600 square feet or more and residential projects valued at least \$20,000.

The Council saw those recommendations last December, but encouraged the Sustainability Commission to reach out to those in the construction industry for their comments. One contractor suggested energy-efficient refrigerators be added to the list of acceptable upgrades, but no other comments were received directly by the city, Knox said.

The Council will meet in a closed session at 6 p.m. to discuss labor and legal matters. The regular meeting will start at 7 p.m. at Council Chambers of City Hall, 250 East L St.

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