

Subscribe now

Fact-first journalism when you need it most. Subscribe to OregonLive.

Advertisement

SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE

Portland's massive clean energy fund plans \$100M spending spree to fight climate change, promote racial and social justice

Updated: Sep. 29, 2021, 7:59 a.m. | Published: Sep. 29, 2021, 6:17 a.m.



(Oregonian/OregonLive file photo) Brooke Herbert/The Oregonian/OregonLive

312
shares

By [Shane Dixon Kavanaugh | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Portland city officials are preparing to bankroll a new bonanza of [clean energy projects and jobs](#) geared toward the city's historically marginalized communities.

About \$100 million will be up for grabs before the end of 2022 for local nonprofit groups that can retrofit low-income homes, plant trees in sun-scorched neighborhoods and perform other activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or build green energy workforces.

Advertisement

The program, known as the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefit Fund, began soliciting proposals Tuesday for a \$60 million tranche to be awarded this spring. It plans to dole out an additional \$35 million to \$45 million later in 2022, city officials said.

The massive cash infusion comes nearly three years after voters in 2018 overwhelmingly approved a 1% tax on large Portland retailers.

Proponents pitched the fund as a first-of-its kind initiative that would provide millions of dollars to create jobs and promote resiliency for those facing the most severe impacts from climate change in Portland — a local Green New Deal of sorts.

But it got off to a slow start. Retailers were charged the tax based on their sales starting Jan. 1, 2019.

It wasn't until April of this year that the program, which is overseen by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, awarded just under \$9 million for a first round of 45 proposals that ranged from Black-led apprenticeship programs in weatherization and solar installation to rooftop gardens run by a local yoga studio.

[See a list of all grant recipients and their projects]

That amount was just a fraction of the money amassed by the city. Budget documents project the fund will have raised more than \$160 million by the end of this year.

“The first round tested our systems and helped us improve the process so we could scale up and award larger grants for bigger projects,” said Sam Baraso, the fund’s program manager.

City officials estimate the local retail tax will continue to generate up to \$60 million annually, a sum that’s double the entire budget for Portland’s emergency communications bureau and nearly as much as Portland and Multnomah County spent on homeless services last year.

In an interview Tuesday, Baraso said the program planned to distribute \$70 to \$90 million annually over the next three or four years to draw down the fund’s massive surplus.

“Given everything that’s happened in the last year, we’re collectively excited to see what we can do,” Baraso said.

As written, the program has few strings attached or measurements for success.

According to city code enacted in 2019, the fund can finance any project related to clean energy, green infrastructure and regenerative agriculture or workforce development programs in those fields.

The projects should prioritize low-income Portlanders, communities of color, women and people with disabilities or who are chronically unemployed, the code states.

Each proposal is reviewed by a nine-person grant committee, five of whom were appointed by the mayor and the city's four elected commissioners. Grant recipients are required to submit quarterly reports to track the progress of their selected projects.

In April, the Community Energy Project was awarded a one-year, \$890,000 grant to perform energy retrofits and repairs for 20 low-income Black homeowners in Portland, including installing rooftop solar panels on five of the homes.

A summary of the proposal claimed these improvements would reduce the properties' energy consumption by 55% and shave 38% off their utility bills.

Charity Fain, Community Energy Project's executive director, said Tuesday the nonprofit launched the project in July and had wrapped up energy audits on all 20 homes, many of them owned by seniors, and already completed the efficiency upgrades on one of them.

"We're moving right along," said Fain, who added that her organization planned to submit at least two new proposals for the next round of funding from the city.

“We believe that everyone deserves a safe, healthy, efficient home, regardless of income,” she said.

The grant application process closes Nov. 30. For mor information visit [the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund grant guide](#).

-- Shane Dixon Kavanaugh; 503-294-7632

Email at skavanaugh@oregonian.com

Follow on Twitter [@shanedkavanaugh](#)

Subscribe to Oregonian/OregonLive [newsletters](#) and [podcasts](#) for the latest news and top stories.

Note to readers: if you purchase something through one of our affiliate links we may earn a commission.

Sponsor Content

Continual Improvement and Employee Support

Continual improvement and employee support is a hallmark of iQ Credit Union. “We took extra care of our employees...

iQ Credit Union



Around the Web