

ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

ACTION AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: January 22, 2009

Action Agenda
Item No. 4-1

SUBJECT: Cool Counties Program

DEPARTMENT: ERCD

PUBLIC HEARING: (Y/N)

ATTACHMENT(S):

Climate Stabilization Declaration and
Resolution
Cool Counties Program information

INFORMATION CONTACT:

David Stancil, 245-2590

PURPOSE: To consider joining the **Cool Counties** program, a consortium of U.S counties working with the National Association of Counties and the Sierra Club that have pledged to inventory and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050. This program is linked and complementary to the existing International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Cities for Climate Protection program, of which Orange County is already a member.

BACKGROUND: Orange County, Chapel Hill and Carrboro joined ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection Program (CCP) in 2003 and 2004, an international consortium of communities administered from ICLEI world headquarters in Toronto, Canada. As called for in the CCP protocol, the three jurisdictions began a process in 2005 to develop an inventory of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a plan for reducing these emissions. The jurisdictions agreed to conduct a countywide inventory and action plan, and entered into a contract with IES of Toronto.

Since that time, ICLEI has opened a U.S. office and begun several related efforts to engage local governments in the U.S. in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Other organizations, including the Sierra Club, have worked in coordination and taken up the mantle of reducing GHG emissions. In 2006, the National Association of Mayors and the Sierra Club created a Cool Cities initiative to promote GHG emissions inventory and reduction. Orange County passed a resolution in support of this effort and in fact joined the Cool Cities municipalities in April 2007.

This, in part, led to a new parallel initiative in July of 2007 at the National Association of Counties annual conference. At this conference, a new partnership was formed, headed by the Sierra Club and the counties of King County, Washington and Fairfax County, Virginia to use the Cool Cities and ICLEI model to develop a **Cool Counties** program for U.S. county governments interested in addressing greenhouse gas emissions. King County agreed to serve as the lead organizing government of Cool Counties (and remains in that role).

To date, 37 counties across the nation have passed the climate stabilization declaration resolution to become Cool Counties. Orange County would be the first county in North Carolina to become a member. Participating counties in the program commit to four actions:

1. Reducing contributions to climate change through internal operations;
2. Demonstrating regional leadership to achieve climate stabilization and protect our communities;
3. Helping our community become climate resilient; and
4. Urging the federal government to support the efforts.

As a participating member in ICLEI and as noted above, the County is already conducting an inventory of emissions and identifying reduction measures for possible implementation. This report is slated for presentation to the joint elected boards on February 25, 2009, with subsequent public input sessions and anticipated discussion at the March 2009 Assembly of Governments meeting.

Although the timelines between ICLEI CCP and Cool Counties programs are different (the ICLEI project addressed reductions for the year 2030, while the Cool Counties Program looks to the year 2050), they are compatible and it is anticipated that the County will be able to set targets that meet both program goals. Adoption of the resolution indicates intent to work toward the reduction goals, which have already been reflected in County policies, and is non-binding.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: There is no financial impact associated with joining the Cool Counties Program. The inventory and partnership efforts called for in the program are already underway and/or are expected to be achievable through future measures. Implementation of reduction measures may have financial implications on future County operations, capital and purchasing processes. A presentation of GHG emissions and reduction measures is planned for February 25, 2009 and more concrete evaluations on the costs of reducing emissions within County government will be assessed following this presentation and in subsequent reports.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Manager recommends the Board approve the resolution to become a member of **Cool Counties**, and instruct staff to begin investigating the means of achieving the desired emission reductions (in conjunction with the ongoing ICLEI greenhouse gas emissions project to be presented February 25, 2009), and report back in the spring of 2009 on potential future actions.

U.S. Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Declaration and Resolution

WHEREAS, there is a consensus among the world's leading scientists that global warming caused by human emission of greenhouse gases is among the most significant problems facing the world today;

WHEREAS, documented impacts of global warming include but are not limited to increased occurrences of extreme weather events (i.e., droughts and floods), adverse impacts on plants and wildlife habitats, threats to global food and water supplies – all of which have an economic impact on communities and their local governments;

WHEREAS, leading scientists have projected that stabilization of climate change in time to minimize such impacts will require a reduction of global warming emissions to 80 percent below current levels by the year 2050;

WHEREAS, currently the United States is responsible for producing approximately 25 percent of the world's global warming pollutants;

WHEREAS, many leading U.S. companies that have adopted greenhouse gas reduction programs to demonstrate corporate and operational responsibility have also publicly expressed preference for the federal government to adopt precise and mandatory emissions targets and timetables as a means by which to provide a uniform and predictable regulatory environment to encourage and enable necessary and long-term business investments;

WHEREAS, Congress and the Administration have strengthened the U.S. Corporate Average Fuel Economy (“CAFE”) standard for cars and light trucks;

WHEREAS, state, regional and local governments throughout the United States are adopting emissions reduction targets and programs and that this effort is bipartisan, coming from Republican and Democratic leadership;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Conference of Mayors has endorsed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which commits cities to reduction of global warming emissions to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012, and calls for a federal limit on emissions;

WHEREAS, the State of California has mandated statewide reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050;

WHEREAS, more than 100 county leaders signed a letter written by Dane County, Wisconsin, that was sent to the President in March 2006 calling for increased energy investment and development of jobs focused on clean energy technologies;

WHEREAS, counties have a unique role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the impacts of climate change through their regional jurisdiction over policy areas such as air quality, land use planning, transportation, zoning, forest preservation, water conservation, and wastewater and solid waste management;

WHEREAS, the economic arguments for implementing climate solutions are compelling, from the near-term economic gains of energy efficiency to the long-term climate stabilization that can prevent irreparable harm from catastrophic climate change impacts;

WHEREAS, many counties throughout the nation, both large and small, are reducing global warming pollutants through programs that provide economic and quality of life benefits such as reducing energy bills, preserving green space, implementing better land use policies, improving air quality, promoting waste-to-energy programs, expanding transportation and work choices to reduce traffic congestion, and fostering more economic development and job creation through energy conservation and new technologies; and

WHEREAS, Orange County and its municipalities have already recognized the need for local action toward greenhouse gas emissions reduction, by developing an inventory of emissions, possible reduction measures and potential reduction targets for the year 2030, to be presented to the elected bodies in February 2009;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

Orange County, as a member of Cool Counties, will take immediate steps to help the federal, state, and our governments within our County to achieve the 2050 climate stabilization goal by making the following commitments:

- i. Complete the ongoing inventory of County government (operational) greenhouse gas ("GHG") emissions and implement policies, programs and operations to achieve significant, measurable and sustainable reduction of those operational GHG emissions to help contribute to the regional reduction targets as identified in paragraph ii and in the Countywide GHG Emissions Inventory and Forecast (as well as subsequent actions that may be created from this report that is currently underway);
- ii. Work closely with local, state, and federal governments and other leaders to reduce countywide GHG emissions to 80 percent below current levels by the year 2050, by completing and implementing the GHG emissions inventory and forecast and establishing short-, mid-, and long-term GHG reduction targets, with recommended goals to stop increasing emissions by 2010, and to achieve a 10 percent reduction every five years thereafter through to 2050; and

iii. Urge Congress and the Administration to enact a multi-sector national program of requirements, market-based limits, and incentives for reducing GHG emissions to 80 percent below current levels by 2050.

We will take immediate steps to identify regional climate change impacts; we will draft and implement a county plan to prepare for and build resilience to those impacts.

This the 22nd day of January, 2009.

Valerie P. Foushee, Chair
Orange County Commissioners

ATTEST:

Donna Baker
Clerk to the Board of Commissioners