

Borough declares energy emergency

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FAIRBANKS - The Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly has declared skyrocketing energy costs a public emergency.

"It is a crisis of generational proportions," Mayor Jim Whitaker said of the impact rising energy costs could have next year on the Fairbanks economy.

The borough said Thursday that it is prepared to put state aid, aimed at boosting energy efficiency in homes, on the fast track.

The Assembly also set aside \$1.3 million for early design studies on a proposed coal-to-synthetic fuel energy project.

Borough officials said part of the expected state aid, about \$8 million from the Alaska Housing Finance Corp., will go toward rating the energy efficiency of thousands of homes this summer.

The housing corporation says homeowners looking for energy rebates under the program must work with a trained, certified energy rater to analyze their homes.

The homeowner can then make improvements, get a follow-up inspection, and apply submitting receipts and a report from the rating specialist for a rebate check that could reach as high as \$10,000 for large-scale improvements.

The rebate program comes as the housing corporation also prepares to expand its long-running weatherization program to cover homeowners making up to the state's median income, which is 77,700 for a family of four. The program was previously limited to low-income residents.

Borough officials said they'll team with the Cold Climate Housing Research Center to get the rebate program on the fast track by training energy raters and contractors.

An estimated one-third of homes in Fairbanks could stand to see significant energy-efficiency upgrades, said John Davies, a director at the research center.

"If we work really hard we might be able to get to between two (thousand) and four thousand (homes) before the end of this season," Davies said.

Information from: Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, www.newsminer.com