

The News-Herald

NOPEC to hand out \$16 million

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By Diane Ryder, The News-Herald

Local communities throughout Northeast Ohio will receive grants of \$50,000 to \$450,000, depending on population, for finding ways to conserve energy through FirstEnergy Solutions Corp.

The \$16 million grant is part of an agreement between FirstEnergy and the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council, a consortium founded in 2000 to negotiate rate reductions for member consumers.

NOPEC Vice Chairman and Geauga County Commissioner Bill Young said the volunteer, nonprofit organization has successfully negotiated more than \$80 million in savings to its 420,000 customers during the last decade.

Young has called a meeting for Saturday of Geauga County's local member communities to explain the grant, and to tell local officials how much each township, village or city will receive. He said the formula is based on the number of consumers in each community, at \$30 per customer, at a minimum of \$50,000 for each community.

The only local government in Geauga County not participating in NOPEC is Troy Township, according to Young. NOPEC has 129 member communities in Northeast Ohio.

NOPEC will receive grant applications beginning March 1, and communities must apply by Feb. 28, 2011.

In Lake County, Mentor will receive \$450,000, Willoughby Hills will get \$109,000, and Willoughby will receive \$260,000, Young said. A total for Lake County was unavailable Thursday afternoon. Lake County's NOPEC representative, Commissioner Dan Troy, was in a meeting and unavailable for comment, according to an office spokeswoman.

Young said the grant money is to be used by communities to develop ways to cut their energy costs.

"Each township has to apply and state what their projects are going to be, to try and minimize their electricity costs and lower their operating costs," Young said. "They want you to come up with permanent ideas, such as installing solar panels, adding insulation, etc."

Bainbridge Township, for example, already has installed new LED lighting at its Centerville Mills Park in a trial program to cut energy costs.

"It only makes sense to lower your costs as much as possible for the future," Commissioner Mary Samide said. "Everyone has to think about that these days."

County Administrator David Lair, who also serves as Newbury Township fiscal officer, said his township has received word that its 1,202 NOPEC customers will generate \$50,000 to the township.

"We think it's really going to be a big deal," Young said. "We're getting over \$1 million for Geauga County communities. It will certainly help them a little bit.

"We'll talk about ways to save natural gas, too," he added.

Young said he expects about 35 local officials to attend the luncheon, to be held at Bass Lake Tavern in Chardon.