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County offers seed money for Vision 2020

By [Steven Friederich](#) - Daily World Writer

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MONTESANO — The county commissioners have pledged to give \$50,000 to a new group working to foster a Grays Harbor economy that relies on environmentally sustainable practices.

County Commissioner Mike Wilson and other commissioners told leaders of the Building a Sustainable Grays Harbor group about their gift late last week. The money is really the start of a larger fundraising campaign, hoping to garner between \$300,000 and \$500,000, with members of the group writing grants and soliciting donations from other municipalities and businesses.

For more than a year now, the push for some kind of united Harbor effort has been spearheaded by Grays Harbor Paper LP, which has



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carved a niche selling 100 percent recycled paper while producing less waste and promoting alternative energy sources.

"Sustainability" can be hard to define, but community leaders see the paper company as the perfect example of what the entire Harbor should do. Grays Harbor Paper is working hand-in-hand with Paneltech, which is producing countertops using the 100 percent recycled paper. It also hopes to convert a waste product from the new Imperium Grays Harbor biodiesel plant into energy and it treats wastewater from nearby Ocean Protein in an arrangement that benefits both companies.

Grays Harbor has involved other business and government leaders and the group wants to produce some kind of action plan to help Harbor communities be more environmentally friendly and yet spur on economic development. That's what the money would be used for.

A public hearing to confirm the transfer of county funds has been set for 2 p.m. July 9, in the County Commission chambers in Montesano. But as far as Wilson is concerned, it's a done deal.

"We all talk about wanting to live in a more sustainable place but the county's putting our money where our mouth is and we feel that we needed to give something big to start their fundraising effort off," Wilson said Monday.

Wilson said he hopes the county's donation will lead other municipalities, businesses and individuals to donate.

About 100 or so business and community leaders met in March to go over the details of what they would like to see Grays Harbor be by 2020.

Ever since the conference, officials at Grays Harbor Paper have been meeting with select government and business leaders to go over what kind of action plan can be set up to make their sustainable dream a reality.

Consultants

Ron Pinnick, a special projects manager at the paper company, said a fundraising effort to pay for a formal action plan, written by a strategic planning consulting firm from Olympia has just begun.

Wilson pins the amount needed to hire Jason Robertson, of Barney and Worth, at somewhere between \$300,000 and \$500,000. Robertson hosted the public forum this past March, where he introduced the community to the idea of a Vision 2020 plan — like he was involved with in Hillsboro, Ore., Castle Rock, Ore. and elsewhere.



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The Building a Sustainable Grays Harbor group has since adopted that slogan as their own, complete with a logo that includes a ship and the words "Vision 2020."

The money would be used by Robertson and his firm to conduct stakeholder interviews, create individualized action plans for the Harbor's communities, and host community forums and surveys, according to Building a Sustainable Grays Harbor group's "Scope of Work Outline" provided to Wilson.

Wilson said the plan would also include the studies that have already taken place across the Harbor and include efforts to spur on economic development by such groups as the Grays Harbor Council of Governments and the Economic Development Council.

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