

## **S-W Council OKs switch to biodiesel**

### **All city vehicles except fire departments will make change**

**Sedro- Woolley** - Following a spirited debate over biodiesel, the City Council narrowly decided to switch the city's transportation fleet over to the alternative fuel.

The council passed a resolution by a 4-3 vote to power all its vehicles, except for those of the fire department, with soy-based fuel. Councilmen Tony Splane, Ted Meamber and Dennis London voted in opposition.

By passing the resolution, the council also accepted a grant of \$6000 from the Northwest Clean Air Agency to pay for a 1,000-gallon tank to store the city's biodiesel, which will most likely be purchased from the Mount Vernon biodiesel distributor Whole Energy.

Proponents say biodiesel, which has lower emissions of greenhouse gases than petroleum-based diesel, can help ward off global warming. The state's 2006 renewable fuel law will require state agencies to run all of their vehicles on B20, or a 20 percent biodiesel fuel blend by 2009, said Whole Energy spokesman Joshua Clements. Though the law does not require cities such as Sedro-Wooley to use B20, City Attorney Eron Berg clarified this morning that a few years after such laws are enacted, the state often orders municipalities to follow suit.

Citing the fuel's average 15 cents per gallon additional cost and reports of adverse effects on the equipment of biodiesel-using vehicles, Splane led the argument against biodiesel.

"Our money could be better spent on sewers and streets than something that's not a proven technology yet," Splane said, referring to a resolution the council passed beforehand to create the city's first-ever storm water tax. "I don't think...right now we should be experimenting with this."

Councilman Louie Requa countered that he had only heard positive things about biodiesel and that the council had not received actual data to support Splane's negative reports. Meamber expressed concern the city would have to pay extra if it encountered future mechanical problems with biodiesel.

"We have similar problems with anything new we do," Requa responded. "We know full well it's in the future, (and) by the time we have this mandate, we're going to have the technology solved. It's important for us to step up to the plate."

Mayor Mike Anderson agreed.

"We should be on the forefront," Anderson said. "You might not get this grant two years from now."

While looking at estimates that indicated the city would spend \$1,751 more a year by using biodiesel instead of regular diesel, Councilman Hugh Galbraith said he normally would vote against the resolution. But knowing that the state will soon require the city to use biodiesel, he said the city should take advantage of the Clean Air Agency grant now.

"If we don't do it, we're in the negative," Galbraith said.

After Splane unsuccessfully moved to delay a vote on the issue by another council meeting, Whole Energy's Clements appeared frustrated.

"I could provide you with days and days of information, and I don't think I could change your mind," he said. "I don't know if anyone could change your mind."

In the end, though, four of the seven-member council voted for the biodiesel resolution.

Its passage extends and expands a nine-month biodiesel trial that three of the city's vehicles have been on since September.