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## Delray Beach considers applying for grant for natural gas stations and trolleys

By Maria Herrera, Sun Sentinel

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Delray Beach

Looking toward a cleaner future, this city wants to get in on the ground floor of a green energy trend: Compressed natural gas-fueled vehicles.

The City Commission is expected Tuesday to give the OK to move forward with a federal grant application that would provide money to purchase vehicles — starting with trolleys — and build a natural gas service station. And one day the city could sell the natural gas for profit.

To get what could be a \$2.5 million grant, the city is partnering with Fort Lauderdale-based Wise Gas, Inc., which will help with grant writing and building and maintaining the natural gas station if the money is awarded. The application is due Friday.

"We don't expect the city to come up with any money out of pocket," said Jeff Greene, Business Development Manager for Wise Gas.

Once built, the station could provide compressed natural gas for the trolleys, other vehicles the city plans to convert and natural gas to corporate fleets and eventually the public, generating revenue for the city.



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"It's time to jump on the bandwagon," Greene said. "The grant money is not going to last forever. Natural gas is clean and abundant."

Louis Herring, general manager of Wise Gas, told the commission that having a service station in [Delray Beach](#) could make the city more attractive and act as an economic development tool. Private companies with natural gas vehicles in their fleets could be attracted to relocating to where there is an easily accessible station.

"There's quite an investment in greening the city," said Mayor Woodie McDuffie. "This is very much in line with what we're trying to do."

Greene said compressed natural gas has been around for about 30 years as alternative fuel for cars. North Miami Beach and Hollywood have had natural gas stations for about 10 years, Greene said.

Wise Gas is scheduled to open a private natural gas service station for corporate fleets in Fort Lauderdale next month. The company also worked with [Broward County](#), Apopka and Clearwater to get grant funding for natural gas stations.

[Delray Beach](#) could also start replacing some of the cars in its fleet with natural gas vehicles as more grant money becomes available. Environmental Services Director Richard Hasko said it would cost too much to convert or replace the city's entire 149-vehicle fleet, which does not include police cars.

Hasko said the city could also use the money it is saving in fuel for the trolleys to begin funding the conversion of some of its fleet.

"This would be fantastic for the city if we can pull it together," Hasko said. "It makes the environmentalists happy and it reduces the city's carbon footprint."

The fuel-expense savings could be huge. Regular gasoline costs about \$2.59 a gallon, while the equivalent amount of natural gas costs about \$1.32.

The city is slated to spend \$1.2 million for fuel in 2011. About \$940,000 of it is spent in gas, Hasko said.

With crude oil still gushing into the Gulf of Mexico after BP's Deepwater Horizon explosion in April, staffers told the City Commission it was a good time to start thinking about alternative sources of fuel.

"You'd hate to discuss the disaster going on," City Commissioner Gary Eliopoulos said of the oil spill. "But unfortunately sometimes it takes something like this to make everyone think."

Natural gas-powered vehicles are similar to a standard gasoline engines. Gasoline fueled cars can be converted, but it's expensive — between \$7,000 and \$13,000. Greene said the Environmental Protection Agency could change rules by the end of this year which could make the conversion cost much less, about \$3,000.

According to Natural Gas Vehicles for America, an organization that promotes the development of vehicles powered by natural gas or hydrogen, there are about 110,000 natural gas vehicles on U.S. roads today, and 1,100 natural gas fueling stations. Only about half of them are open to the public.

"There are certain areas where the infrastructure is more in place than in other places," said Scott DeMasso, owner of Space Coast Honda in Cocoa Beach which sells the Honda GX, one of a few natural gas vehicles on the market.

DeMasso said his dealership has been working mostly with municipalities, such as Palm Bay, but sales are slow. Few drivers want to buy a car they would have to drive for miles to refuel, but if more service stations were open to the public, DeMasso said the cars would sell faster.

"What do they say? What came first, the chicken or the egg?" he said.

Maria Herrera can be reached at [meherrera@SunSentinel.com](mailto:meherrera@SunSentinel.com) or 561-243-6544.

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