

Council says county can't farm out jobs without proving savings

■ In last meeting before recess, the council also considers incentives for 'green' buildings and forest preservation

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County agencies will have to show that they will achieve cost savings of at least 25 percent before they could contract out county employees' jobs, under a measure that the County Council approved without dissent on Tuesday.

The protection applies to merit system employees, including temporary and seasonal workers, who are members of unions that the county government recognizes as bargaining units.

The threshold applies to any service contract that would exceed \$75,000 annually and that would hurt county employees by reducing or eliminating their work, pay or benefits.

Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) is expected to sign the bill, which will go into effect Jan. 1.

Before contracting out county employees work, agencies would have to consider alternatives, show that they would save at least 25 percent of the value of the contract, consult with the union and offer a plan of employee assistance. The union could offer its own proposal for county employees to do the work and achieve the savings.

"One of the reasons I'm supportive of this is ... it gives county employees the opportunity to demonstrate that they can do the job as well or better than they are doing now," said Marilyn J. Praisner, chairwoman of the council's Management and Fiscal Policy Committee.

Gino Renne, president of MCGEO, the union that represents about 5,000 Montgomery County and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission employees, said union members have waited for these "rules of engagement" for 12 years.

The legislation does not apply to contracts for goods or construction or limit the authority of the county to abolish positions or lay off workers.

Some other jurisdictions — including Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties and Takoma Park — prohibit contracting out jobs of union members.

Also Tuesday, which was the last

council session scheduled until after the Sept. 12 primary election, three council members introduced legislation that would give a property tax credit of 50 percent for five years or 25 percent for 10 years for buildings that meet standards set by the U.S. Green Buildings Council or the Maryland Green Buildings Council for energy savings and environmentally friendly design.

Although "green" building costs more, it yields savings in the future and the credit is an incentive to go green earlier, said sponsor Nancy M. Floreen (D-At Large) of Garrett Park.

But council President George L. Leventhal said Floreen's proposal does not go as far as his April proposal that would require all new commercial, apartment or condominium buildings 10,000 square feet or larger to meet a certain level of the national council's standards and would offer incentives for meeting those standards.

Leventhal (D-At Large) of Takoma Park said he is concerned that tax credit bill would allow council members to say they voted green when a bill that would do more is still waiting for action in the Transportation and Environment Committee of which Floreen is chairwoman.

The council also received recommendations from a task force that the county strengthen deterrents to cutting down trees and established forests. Suggested measures include lowering from 40,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet the area of clearing that requires a sediment and erosion control plan and requiring one acre of tree planting, rather than a quarter acre of planting, for every acre of trees removed. The group also called for a countywide tree ordinance, tree-cover requirements and increased monitoring and enforcement.

The task force and recommendations arose from Redskins owner Daniel Snyder's decision to remove trees to improve the river view from his home in Potomac.

In other business, several council members said they have received many complaints about the county's use of tar and chip rather than asphalt on neighborhood roads. Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said the council should review the practice when it returns from recess in September.