Electric buses could arrive by end of year

BY LADONNA BEEKER
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SENECA — Seneca's carbon footprint into the world of electric buses is slowly moving into the city's system, but staff is working to gather $28 million more in grants.

In November, Seneca announced a $4.1 million grant from the Federal Transit Authority's Transit Investment in Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction program to purchase four EcoRide electric buses. Earlier this year, Planning Director Ed Halbig said the city applied for three additional grants, which could bring in $28 million to benefit the city's electric bus endeavor.

The three grants include the TIGER grant, which is $13.5 million; the Livability grant at about $6 million; and the State of Good Repair grant at $2.8 million. Halbig said the additional grants would benefit the electric buses by providing a maintenance facility for the buses, expand service bus routes and improve highways that the buses will travel on. City staff expects to know if more grant money will be awarded by sometime this summer.

But before the electric buses, which are being built by Proterra in Greenville, can roll onto the city streets and highways, the paper trail has to come to an end.

"We are still working on contracts at this point," Halbig said, adding that the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, Proterra, Clemson Area Transit and city officials have to agree on contracts before the electric buses can be built. "There has been a lot of running the paper around at this point."

PROTERRA AMERICAN-MADE ELECTRIC BUSES

NO OIL changes, roaring engine or tailpipe smoke

$130K IN maintenance savings

FULLY CHARGES in 10 minutes

300-PLUS MILES per day, 30-plus miles per charge

AUTOMATIC CONNECTION to a charging station

The contracts also deal with the electric buses' charging stations and locations.

"We've talked and met with the folks that have designed (the charging stations)," Halbig said. "They believe downtown is feasible for charging stations. It's all going to depend on getting the contracts right. The charging stations are an integral part of the bus purchases themselves."

The city expects to have two fast-charging stations — one downtown and another at an undecided location — and a slow-charging station possibly at the former Propex site.

If everything goes smoothly with the contracts and building and designing plans, Halbig said the public could see the electric buses on the roadways by the end of the year.

"We have got a lot of work to do between now and the end of the year," Halbig said.

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