

South Hunterdon Co-Op Going Solar

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LAMBERTVILLE -- A proposal to establish a field of solar panels on land behind the West Amwell Township municipal building moved a step closer this week with the naming of a consultant for the complex project.

The Lambertville city council, on behalf of the South Hunterdon Renewable Energy Co-op, selected the Birdsall Service Group of Farmingdale as the consultant.

It will begin work immediately on weighing the merits of two proposals that the co-op has received to implement the renewable energy project.

The concept is for a private firm to build and operate the system. The winning firm would receive revenue by selling energy to the stakeholders and under federal programs be able to claim attractive tax credits and other reap other benefits from the project.

Mayor David DelVecchio, the leader of the movement, said the process has taken almost two years to get to this point because the entities involved were entering uncharted waters.

"There was a lot to be learned. And at one point it looked like it may not take place. But now that we have a consultant and proposals, things are falling in place," said DelVecchio.

He said the Birdsall group will be able to evaluate the two existing proposals and make a recommendation in time for the city council's Nov. 15 meeting.

The city council on Monday approved a \$15,000 bond issue to finance the consultant's services.

"The bond issue that we approved will be reimbursed to the city later when the system is

up and running. If for some reason the project falls through, this will be the only money we will have spent in exploring the establishment of a co-op for solar renewable energy. At this point I don't see how we won't be going forward," said DelVecchio.

Although a new firm to the city council, the mayor said Birdsall has extensive experience in similar work for Somerset, Union and Monmouth counties.

The co-op members are Lambertville, the city's elementary school, the city's municipal authority and its library; West Amwell Township and the township's elementary school; and South Hunterdon Regional High School.

The project had been stalled since it was first approved by the co-op last year because of complex procedural problems that were unexpected. The co-op at first was under the impression it could simply seek bids for one firm to propose a system that would provide solar powered energy to the different entities. After trial and error, the co-op regrouped to hire the consultant to help "compare apples to apples," according to DelVecchio.

The review by the consultant will include the technical aspects, the rates to be charged for the power and the financial structure.

Dan Seiter, South Hunterdon High School's representative to the co-op, said, "We are very much encouraged by getting to this point and look to the long-range benefits for everyone."

One of the principal aims of the project is to provide sustainable cost savings for the stakeholders, which they believe will be compounded in future years.