
Solar field will save this N.J. high school \$807K



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ALEXANDRIA TWP. - A solar field under construction at Delaware Valley Regional High School is expected to save the district \$807,000 over the next 15 years.

Engineered to meet 80 percent of the school's electricity needs, the 1 megawatt system is being installed on a disused field north of the school.

Advanced Solar Products has designed the project and is overseeing the construction. This week's warm, muddy weather saw several rows of steel racks anchored in the ground and bolted together, while crews pounded in more uprights, assembled more racks and buried conduits in trenches.

When the photovoltaic cells are in place, possibly as soon as April, the solar field will be turned over to IGS Solar, which is financing the project and will maintain the equipment, mow the grass beneath the panels, and sell the electricity to Del Val.

The juice will cost 4.9 cents per kilowatt hour, as compared to the effective rate of 10.6 cents JCP&L is charging. During 2015, Del Val consumed 1,680,700 kilowatt hours of electricity, and for the past three years, Del Val's electric bill has been averaging \$190,370 a year. Savings the first full year are expected to exceed \$66,000.

"This is that rare initiative that saves money while reducing our impact on the environment and enhancing the education we offer," said Superintendent Daria Wasserbach. "A working solar field will be a living STEM lesson for our students."



Quiet H.S. art student has over 11K Instagram followers

Del Val is not paying to build or maintain the solar panels. It is simply lending the space and agreeing to buy the electricity, explains Del Val Business Administrator Teresa Barna. She noted that the district is being reimbursed for consulting fees paid to the professionals who helped prepare the request for proposals and evaluate those proposals.

The solar field is surrounded by a strip of deciduous trees and will have a 6-foot-high, black vinyl fence along its perimeter. It is beside the lacrosse fields and out of sight of residential neighbors and public roads. A buried power line will convey the electricity to the school.

At the end of the 15-year power purchase agreement, the board will decide to either tell the solar panels' owner to remove them; renegotiate the power-purchasing agreement; or buy the system at fair-market value.

The ASP/IGS partnership was one of seven outfits and partnerships that submitted proposals. Those proposals were passed to a special evaluation team, which included Mrs. Barna; board member Geoffrey Stanley; Del Val Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds Mattie O'Brien; Vice Principal Michael Gurysh; environmental legal counsel Ryan Scerbo of DeCotiis, Fitzgerald & Cole; and two experts from Gabel Associates, an energy consulting firm.

The dominant criterion was the price of electricity, and ASP/IGS' price was the lowest. Other factors included capability, experience and ability to make this project an educational tool.

According to the evaluating team's report, ASP/IGS will install a flat-screen display inside the building, and a web-based platform for displaying and accessing system performance information. During oral interviews, the (ASP/IGS) team elaborated on significant event and outreach support for the district as part of the project. The ASP/IGS team also included significant, already developed, curriculum content for use by the district."

The solar field's generating capacity is capped at 80 percent of the school's average need so that it doesn't produce more electricity than Del Val can use, which would be against state regulations.

The Board of Education voted to award the power purchase agreement to ASP/IGS last May.

The Del Val campus comprises 127 acres. In the early 1980s the owner of the horse farm on the Everittstown-Pittstown Road (Route 513) wanted to buy 40 adjoining acres. But the school board demurred, deciding that someday the school might need that land. The solar panels will be installed on some of that acreage.

This item was submitted by Rick Epstein.

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