

Cabrillo College to go Solar  
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BY: DAVID CARKHUFF

APTOS — When Cabrillo College trustees gave the green light Monday to partially convert the campus to solar power, it was a vindication of sorts for Roger Denault.

“It feels like we’re at the knee of the curve. Definitely with the sensitivity to global warming, everybody is trying to get in on the action to do their part,” Denault said recently while hammering out plans for the solar-power installation.

Monday, the board pushed the project forward, setting the stage for a vote next month on a power-purchase agreement.

Denault’s Solar Technologies, the prospective installer of the solar-power array, and Generating Assets, the potential investor, have worked for months with college officials to find an economically feasible way to install more than 6,500 solar panels on the campus.

The key is a \$2.2 million rebate from the California Public Utilities Commission to be applied against the cost of power from Pacific Gas and Electric. The installation cost of \$8 million, in the current plans, would be partly offset by this \$2.20-per-watt rebate, officials explained. Denault’s company submitted applications for the rebate at a time when dollars for this subsidy were drying up.

“The rebates have gone down considerably since the end of the year,” he said. “We saw the opportunity kind of vanishing, so we approached the schools and we approached Cabrillo.”

Now, after months of planning, the college board agreed to pursue further negotiations, and tentatively hopes to sign off on an agreement next month so the parties can take advantage of the rebate.

Denault said he started dabbling in solar power back in the 1970s, so this project — creating what would be the largest solar-power installation in Santa Cruz County — marked a watershed moment for his efforts to develop solar technology.

“We hope to get the stars aligned on this thing,” he said.

“It’s challenging to get the cost low enough so the investors can make a minimal profit. We’re looking under every rock to see if we can squeeze some money here and there,” Denault said.

Under the pending agreement, Generating Assets would own the panels and then sell the power generated by the array to PG&E. Details remain to be worked out, such as the location of panels.

“The key is to find locations for the panels that minimize the effect on the native plants and animals,” Denault said.

The PUC grant requires the project to be completed by October 2008.

The project has widespread support on campus.

“The Student Senate unanimously endorses this project and is proud to have a small part in making it a reality,” said Marko Realmonte, president of the student senate. “The array offers an incredible learning tool for our student population and a very visible example to our community of our commitment to a ‘greener’ campus.”

“Reversing global warming is a major defining challenge of this century,” said Cabrillo College President Brian King. Cabrillo is proud to be on the forefront of taking action to make our campus climate neutral and sustainable.”

King also signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, an effort to make campuses more environmentally sustainable.

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