

Green project closer to green light in Tracy

By Jennie Rodriguez, Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2010

TRACY - A proposed solar farm west of Tracy is closer to expanding onto city-owned property and beginning to produce clean energy.

The city is planning to sell 50 acres and lease 150 acres to GWF Power so the company can expand its peaker power plant with a solar farm.

On Tuesday, City Council members voted unanimously on a lease agreement with purchase options.

Construction is expected to generate 400 jobs. The conversion should increase the plant's capacity from 170 megawatts to more than 300 megawatts. The solar farm is expected to produce 30 megawatts.

GWF will pay the city a \$100,000, nonrefundable deposit to secure the site; a \$1 million public benefit fee; and rent payments of as much as \$425,000 per year.

City Manger Leon Churchill said that money will go into the general fund, which is used for operating expenses, such as public safety salaries, community programs and park maintenance.

As part of the deal, the company is funding an energy efficiency training certificate program in Tracy.

"We think the financial benefits are good," Churchill said. "The other benefit, I think, it continues to put a bigger footprint for city as being hospitable to renewable energy."

GWF's revamped power plant supports the city's environmental and sustainability strategy, which encompasses measures to reduce energy consumption and waste; the development of a sustainability action plan; and efforts that encourage renewable and alternative energy uses.

The solar project also contributes to meeting the state's renewable energy goal to have 33 percent of electricity produced from renewable sources by 2020.

GWF is weighing two methods - solar thermal technology or solar photovoltaic technology - which will either generate electricity for the grid or produce energy to power the plant more cleanly.

Churchill said the company has agreed to proceed with mitigation measures that will lessen environmental impacts, such as a construction emissions reduction plan and pay fees associated with impacts on biological resources.

There is, however, one hurdle for the project to clear before it can move forward. The city-owned site where the solar farm is to be installed is designated by the federal government for recreational use or for the building of a school.

Proposed federal changes that would reclassify the land are supported by Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and are expected to pass by early next year.

Assuming the amendments take place, construction on the solar farm would start in the spring, Churchill said.

Birth defect study likely to be released today

By Eiji Yamashita
Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Nov. 22, 2010

Activists advocating for Kettleman City residents say the state will release a report today on its investigation into the cluster of birth defects in the impoverished farmworker community.

Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction, said he was alerted by the state Department of Public Health, one of two state agencies working on the study.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in January ordered two state agencies to investigate what could be causing the health anomalies that have confounded the community for more than a year. The birth defects issue became a rallying point for residents opposing the expansion of the West's largest toxic waste facility run by Waste Management.

Although the investigation report has been much anticipated by residents, Angel took issue with the timing of the release.

Angel said Monday's report release would give hardly any time for the residents to review what's expected to be hundreds of pages before an upcoming community meeting to be conducted by the state Department of Public Health and the California Environmental Protection Agency.

No confirmed date for the meeting has been announced, although Angel said the state is looking at Nov. 30 as a likely date.

"As the date for this meeting still hadn't been confirmed, Greenaction wrote letters to the agencies saying they need to share information they have," Angel said. "But it would be ridiculous to have the meeting right after Thanksgiving if they haven't even announced it yet."

While saying the report may have valuable information about environmental exposures in Kettleman City, Angel said he is prepared to challenge the legitimacy of the analysis on potential links between the landfill operation and the birth defects.

Kettleman City birth defects not linked to toxic dump, state investigation finds

By Louis Sahagun, staff writer

L.A. Times news blog, Monday, Nov. 22, 2010

A state investigation did not find a common underlying cause for recent birth defects, including heart problems and cleft palates and lips, in Kettleman City, a Central California farming community of about 1,500 mostly Spanish-speaking residents, according to a long-awaited report released Monday.

"While we wish there was an explanation for what caused the birth defects experienced by the children we studied in Kettleman City," said California Department of Public Health Director Mark Horton, "our investigation finds that no common health or environmental factor links the cases."

State health investigators tested air, water and soil throughout the region and studied family histories to determine why at least five of 20 babies born between September 2007 and November 2009 in Kettleman City suffered birth defects.

The 160-page report did not satisfy residents and environmentalists who wanted a clear statement of what caused the health problems or the establishment of a connection to a nearby toxic waste dump, the only facility in California permitted to accept cancer-causing polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

"I always expected a whitewash," said Bradley Angel, toxic waste coordinator for the environmental organization Greenaction]. "State investigators didn't test blood or tissue samples, or even look for pesticides inside peoples' homes."