

NEWS

News

Proposed solar plant in Southwest Valley closer to reality

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A sign of the growing interest in Arizona's renewable-energy market, more than 60 people packed a tiny room at Phoenix City Hall today to learn more about a proposed solar plant at a city landfill off Arizona 85 in the far southwest Valley.

They were solar manufacturers and civil engineers, investors and attorneys. All showed enthusiasm for the \$1 billion project, which would be financed and built by the private sector.

"It's great the city is taking a long look at things and making an effort to improve its sustainability goals," said Ryan Hurley, an attorney with Scottsdale-based Rose Law Group, which represents solar companies.

A three-person City Council panel recommended the project to the full council, which could vote on the matter as early as next week.

By May, the city is expected to seek bids from solar companies to build the plant on 1,200 acres at the Phoenix-owned State Route 85 Landfill in Buckeye. The plant would generate between 150 to 200 megawatts of energy, enough to power up to 50,000 homes at once.

The city hopes to select a successful bidder by early September, though some had concerns with that timeline.

Councilman Claude Mattox, a member of the Economy, Commerce and Sustainability Subcommittee that tentatively approved the plan, said he would like to see the bid process expedited. He also wants the city to begin the permitting process with Buckeye and Maricopa County.

That would help the solar company meet a strict deadline to apply for hundreds of millions of dollars in federal stimulus funds.

"My disappointment is we've been dealing with this stuff for a long time and I just wish we could move a little quicker," Mattox said.

To jump-start renewable-energy projects, the economic-stimulus package provides grants of up to 30 percent of construction costs if companies can break ground by December 2010, said Brian Rasmussen of California-based BrightSource Energy Inc. a potential bidder.

Rasmussen said his company would not submit a bid if the lifespan of the plant was not extended to at least 25 to 30 years. City officials said they would consider the change, though they earlier estimated the plant could only operate for 20 years before the city would need the vacant parcel for landfill use.

