

Stimulus money set to help fund solar panel project

By: ED MOORHOUSE Burlington County Times
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MOUNT LAUREL - The township's Municipal Utilities Authority is getting \$4.4 million in federal stimulus money to install solar panels that will power its wastewater pumping station.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection announced the funding last week when the agency approved \$73 million in infrastructure construction projects across the state.

Ground-mounted solar panels will be added to the primary wastewater station and a drinking water well off Ramblewood Parkway. The solar panels are expected to generate 529 kilowatts of solar power.

"It's a great boon for the MUA to get this grant money," MUA Executive Director Pam Carolan said.

The \$5.3 million project is being funded by economic stimulus money the DEP received through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and a low-interest loan from the state's Economic Recovery and Assistance Plan.

Township officials said the MUA pays \$90,000 a year to power both the wastewater station and well. Once installed, the solar panels will offset those costs. The MUA also will earn solar renewable energy credits that it can sell to electric suppliers for profit.

The MUA awarded a design-and-build contract to Lighton Industries of Toms River last month, Carolan said. Construction could begin in March and the project should be completed by the summer, she said.

The authority discussed the project with residents who live near the station and well. It will install a fence, landscape and make other aesthetic improvements to the 1.5-acre property to shield the panels from view.

"Most of the local residents are very happy with the project," Carolan said.

The DEP also awarded money for projects that will improve water-distribution and sewage-collection systems in Newark, upgrades to Ocean County's sewerage system, and the construction of stormwater systems to protect neighborhoods in Bayonne and Elizabeth from flooding.

Acting DEP Commissioner Mark N. Mauriello said the state's economic recovery plan and federal stimulus money "are making significant investments in the Garden State's environmental future."