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Mount Laurel goes green

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MOUNT LAUREL - The Municipal Utilities Authority will soon go out to bid for a \$5.3 million project to install solar panels at the township's primary wastewater pumping station and a drinking water well off Ramblewood Parkway.

The state Department of Environmental Protection has approved the township's application for the project, which will be partially funded by federal stimulus money.

"It's an existing facility and we're going to add ground-mounted solar panels that will generate 529 kilowatts of solar power," MUA executive director Pam Carolan said. "They're going to power both facilities, so over a year the amount of electricity we purchase from PSE&G will be zero."

Carolan said the MUA pays \$90,000 a year to power both the wastewater station and the well. She said the MUA will advertise for bids shortly and award a contract in September. The contracted firm would complete a project design by the end of October or November, with construction to begin in November or December.

The solar panels would be up and running by next summer, Carolan said. "We've been looking for ways to reduce our electricity consumption," she said. "We're going to reduce our carbon footprint."

Half of the cost of the project will be covered by federal stimulus money. The rest of the loan, issued by the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust, has to be paid back with a low-market interest rate over 20 years, Carolan said.

The panels would generate enough energy savings to pay off the rest of the loan in seven or eight years, she said.

Mayor Jim Keenan said the Township Council supports the project.

"The Township Council heard about this project a few months ago and now it's come to fruition," Keenan said. "It will also generate enough savings to pay back part of the loan. The council is happy to see green projects in Mount Laurel."

Carolan said the MUA also will earn solar renewable energy credits that it can sell to electric suppliers for profit.

"The stimulus money and the [energy credits] make this project attractive," she said.

Carolan said the authority has discussed the project with residents who live near the wastewater plant and drinking well.

"We've held meetings with neighbors since it backs up against a residential area, and we've gotten positive feedback," she said.

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