

Mohawk Trail Building Subcommittee supports solar panel project

By [BELLA LEVAVI](#), Staff Writer, Published: 9/1/2022 4:07:56 PM, Modified: 9/1/2022 4:07:44 PM

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BUCKLAND — The Mohawk Trail Regional School District Building Subcommittee voted unanimously to recommend that the full School Committee sign a letter of intent with Solect Energy to install solar panels on the middle and high school roof.

Alexandra Osterman, parent of a Mohawk Trail Regional School eighth grader and a member of both the Local Education Council and Outdoor Advisory Council, said the unanimous vote is a “huge win for the district.”

Andrew Baker, a member of Shelburne’s Energy Committee and Selectboard, said the Building Subcommittee has been working on the preliminary stages of installing solar panels for eight months.

“This work will hopefully lead to the second step,” Baker said.

Solect Energy was chosen in a public procurement process overseen by Power Options, a nonprofit that works with schools and municipalities across the state on renewable energy projects.

Matt Shortsleeve, vice president of Solect Energy, explained at an earlier meeting that the district would not have to pay any money upfront to install solar panels. The Hopkinton-based company does the installation, and then charges Mohawk Trail for the energy it uses. The panels are expected to generate about two-thirds of the school’s power, Shortsleeve said. The school uses about 663,000 kilowatt hours of energy monthly.

If the full School Committee agrees to sign a letter of intent with Solect Energy, then the company will perform an evaluation on the school roof, and see if the roof is viable for construction.

“The due diligence is coming up next,” Baker said.

Two meetings ago, the Building Subcommittee had concerns about the roof withstanding solar panels.

“Since then, they gave themselves some homework,” Osterman said.

Solect Energy representatives supplied the subcommittee with a list of other schools that have worked with them, as well as a list of references. Building Subcommittee member Scott Purinton visited a large number of facilities and asked questions, Osterman said.

The Building Subcommittee also spoke with the school's roofing company and made sure the warranty would not void with the installation of solar panels.

The warranty on the roof lasts for 20 years, according to Osterman. Some portions of the roof where solar panels would be installed have nine years left on the warranty. It has already expired on other parts of the roof.

Osterman noted the bars that hold the solar panels in place do not penetrate the roof. This was one concern voiced by subcommittee members, as they thought it might lead to leaks in the future.

Solect Energy submitted two proposals to the subcommittee. The first proposal involved having solar panels across the entire roof. However, the subcommittee decided not to add panels to the flat part. Solect Energy then submitted a second proposal only including panels on the slanted roof sections.

"It is still the size of 20 homeowner systems," Osterman said of the solar project.

Mohawk Trail currently pays 11 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity. Solect Energy plans to charge 5 cents per kilowatt hour, according to its proposal, which would save the school \$26,000 annually. A letter of intent from the School Committee could include a clause stating that if the rate were to increase to a certain level, the school district will walk away from the deal.

"There is little risk to sign it because they can walk away," Osterman said.

Baker noted the cost may be even less than 5 cents per kilowatt hour, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act. The act just increased the subsidy for solar electricity from 26% to 30%, a rate that was about to decrease to 22% before this act was passed.

The Building Subcommittee will present its findings to the full School Committee in a virtual meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 7. The School Committee will then vote on a letter of intent on Wednesday, Sept. 14, as part of its regularly scheduled hybrid meeting.

"Hopefully they pick up the ball and move it forward," Baker said.

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