

Source for the following article:

Picture, Bill. "Sunset District Project to Triple City's Solar Output." *San Francisco Bay Crossings*.

12 May 2009

< <http://www.baycrossings.org/dispnews.asp?id=2182>>

Sunset District Project to Triple City's Solar Output

On May 12, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors gave San Francisco-based Recurrent Energy the go-ahead to install 25,000 solar panels on the rooftop of an eight-block reservoir in San Francisco's Sunset District.



Current aerial view of the eight-block reservoir in San Francisco's Sunset District where 25,000 solar panels will soon be installed.

By Bill Picture

On May 12, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors gave San Francisco-based Recurrent Energy the go-ahead to install 25,000 solar panels on the rooftop of an eight-block reservoir in San Francisco's Sunset District. The 5-megawatt system will be the largest in California, and the largest municipal solar project in the country. (There are larger non-municipal systems in other states, including a 14-megawatt, 70,000 panel array in Nevada.)

Under the terms of the approved deal, Recurrent Energy will foot the bill for the system's installation and maintenance, saving the City of San Francisco about \$42 million in construction costs. In exchange, the City has agreed to buy the electricity from Recurrent Energy for 25 years at a fixed, below-market price. Also written into the deal is an option for the City to buy the system outright from Recurrent in year 7, 15 or 25 of the contract.

In a written statement, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom said, "San Francisco took another major step towards achieving our commitments to reduce greenhouse gases and grow our green economy. With this single project, we will help lead the state towards a future of clean, renewable energy." In 2005, Newsom pledged that all city-government-used power would come from clean, renewable sources by 2010.

Ed Harrington, General Manager of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which oversees the purchase of solar power for the City, added, "With this agreement, San Francisco can continue to be a leader in developing the solar energy markets while taking concrete steps toward meeting our renewal energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals."

A No-Brainer

While the project's size and rooftop perch is expected to present some unique logistical challenges, those involved say that the reservoir lid is an ideal place for solar panels.

"Its size allows for a large-scale project that will feed directly into the utility grid, instead of having to extend utility lines for miles from a remote location," says Jeffrey Yee of Bass Electric, one of several local companies contracted by Recurrent Energy to handle the installation.

The Sunset Reservoir Solar Project is Bass Electric's largest project to date. The company most recently installed a 1-megawatt system for the Santa Rosa School District.

It's also the biggest project to date for Richmond-based architecture-and-engineering firm Interactive Resources, which has been hired by Bass Electric to provide structural design.

"But it may not be our largest for long," says Tom Butt of Interactive Resources. "We are part of the design team for a 10-megawatt project in Ontario, Canada."

"Being part of something superlative is always exciting," Butt adds. "We always want to be part of the biggest and the best."

"The Sunset Reservoir project is relatively straightforward," adds Helena Kimball of Recurrent Energy. "The roof is flat and basically level, underwent a recent seismic retrofit, and has no shade or sun-obstruction issues."

The Sunset District is a famously gray part of the City, receiving an average of about 15 percent less sunlight than other neighborhoods. That might lead some to question whether the system, once installed, will be able to work at its full capacity. But solar industry experts say that clear skies, while nice, are not necessary. "It is a myth that you need direct sunlight and clear skies to produce solar electricity," says Kimball. "Ambient UV light, much of which makes it through a fog layer, can generate solar electricity."

Even on the grayest day, the system will more than triple the City's current solar output. That electricity will be used solely to power municipal properties, including public schools, the San Francisco International Airport, San Francisco General Hospital and MUNI. This new source of clean, renewable energy is expected to reduce the City's carbon emissions by more than 109,000 metric tons. That's the equivalent of taking 1,000 San Francisco houses off of the grid.

Every effort is also being made to ensure that the final design is as neighbor-friendly as possible. The solar modules being used are unobtrusive and will not obstruct any views. In fact, from most sides of the reservoir, the modules will not even be visible.

The Icing on the Cake

As exciting as it is to think that San Francisco is several steps closer to eliminating the need to purchase electricity from traditional, non-green sources, it is equally as exciting to think about the effect that projects like this one will have on the local economy. The Sunset Reservoir solar project, which is expected to break ground later this year, will create 71 green jobs. Those hires will receive on-the-job training. Apprentices will also receive trade-related classroom training to help ensure superb craftsmanship.

"We are thrilled to be bringing so many green jobs to San Francisco," says Recurrent Energy spokesperson Helena Kimball. "And we're especially proud to be ensuring the use of local hires." Of those 71 jobs, 21 will be filled through the City of San Francisco's CityBuild Initiative, which ensures active recruitment in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

“Recent statistics say that green jobs are growing at ten times the rate of conventional jobs,” says Tom Butt of Interactive Resources. “Few, if any, new jobs are being created in the carbon economy. If we are going to reverse the economic downturn, this is where that game will be played and won.”

“Bass Electric and the others are local business enterprises,” adds Jeffrey Yee of Bass Electric. “This project is truly a big win for the environment, for local labor and for local business.”



Aerial view of the Sunset District reservoir with an artist rendering of what the planned solar array will look like once installed. Below: From street level the new solar array will be barely noticeable.

