

RSU 9 considers solar electricity proposal

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By Dee Menear

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FARMINGTON — Regional School Unit 9 directors Tuesday evening continued consideration of contracting with a solar energy provider during a presentation with Agnieszka Dixon, attorney with Drummond Woodsum of Portland.

Dixon had given similar presentations to “five or six school boards across the state,” she said.

A new state law, known as the Net Metering Law, provides opportunities for municipalities and institutions to take advantage of energy credits by purchasing electricity from solar farms not on their property, Dixon said.

During the Jan. 28 meeting, Kurt Penney of ReVision Energy said the district could save thousands of dollars per year on energy if directors decided to join a solar energy aggregate at Souther Farm in Livermore Falls.

Regional School Unit 73 in Jay and Maine School Administrative District 28 in Camden were already on board with the project, he said.

Dixon said by entering into an agreement, the district would commit to purchasing a certain percentage of solar-generated electricity, known as credits. The credits would be at a discounted rate and be applied to the district’s Central Maine Power bill.

“The best explanation I have heard is that it is like buying a discounted CMP gift card,” Dixon said.

The initial term of the agreement is 20 years but there is an additional five-year term that would automatically kick in unless the law is taken off the books, she said.

Before committing to the project, the board would need to review past electricity use and assess the district's future needs.

"You are being asked to project the district electricity use for the next 25 years. It is not an easy task," she said.

Decreased enrollment leading to school closures can affect electricity costs, as can increased enrollment leading to expansion of facilities.

She estimated an annual savings of nearly \$150,000.

Dixon said the board could enter into an agreement without seeking districtwide approval.

"This is not a long-term debt. It is more like a lease-purchase agreement, " she said.

Finally, she asked to board to determine why it was considering using solar power.

"We talked about financial benefits. We didn't talk about the environmental statement and the advantages a renewable energy market provides," she said.

Dixon will draft a contract for the board to consider at its next meeting.

If the board moves forward with the proposal, savings would show up as soon as the project begins producing net energy credits, she added.

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