

## Medford dubbed 'an untapped solar resource'

### Study says city is in prime solar real estate; work to begin on installing solar panels on six municipal buildings

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MEDFORD — The city could recoup all of the expense of fitting several key municipal buildings with electricity-producing solar panels, according to a city-commissioned study presented Thursday by Medford's RHT Energy Solutions.

Out of 15 locations that were studied, six sunny spots on Medford municipal buildings ranked as prime real estate for solar energy production based on their energy potential, ability to host a panel, eligibility for programs that help compensate for the cost of panels and other criteria, said Buzz Thielemann, RHT owner. The six locations have a total capacity of 230 kilowatts, the equivalent of 2,300 100-watt light bulbs, with the use of photovoltaic solar panels.

Medford's southern locale gives it the most solar-energy-making capacity among all the cities on Oregon's Interstate 5, according to the state Department of Energy. Portland has the lowest capacity.

"Medford is an untapped solar resource," Thielemann said. "We are unique. We don't have the shade of Mount Ashland. We are in this nice, little bowl. It's a great opportunity."

The first municipal solar panel is slated for the shop roof at the U.S. Cellular Community Park at 300 Lowery Lane next month, said Brian Sjothun, Medford parks and recreation director. The inconspicuous spot at the sports park is one of the top six municipal solar sites.

The \$14,000 project was accepted into Pacific Power's Feed In Tariff program, which will pay the city \$1,415 per year to feed the solar energy back into the electrical grid, Thielemann said. The panel has a 2.4-kilowatt capacity.

The other highest ranking locations include the City Hall Annex parking lot for police vehicles, Medford Regional Waste Water property, the City Service Center on North Columbus Avenue, Fire Station No. 6 on Barnett Road and the City Parking Garage at Sixth Street and Riverside Avenue.

Altogether the panels at the six locations would cost nearly \$1.9 million. The city would have two options for obtaining compensation for all or part of those funds.

One option would be a combination of tax credits from the Oregon Department of Energy and incentives from the Energy Trust of Oregon, which could pay up to 50 to 60 percent of the cost of panels. A second option is the Feed in Tariff program, which has the potential of compensating the city fully for panel costs over a shorter period of time, Thielemann said.

A \$30,000 grant from the Oregon Business Development Department's Infrastructure Finance Authority paid for the RHT study, said City Manager Mike Dyal.

Mayor Gary Wheeler said the City Council would schedule a time to discuss whether more solar panel projects would fit into this year's budget or whether they would have to wait for the next biennium.

"It would make the city a leader in alternative energy," Wheeler said of the projects. "We already have hybrid cars we're using. Switching from V-8 to V-6 engines has saved us money in gas."

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## **Top spots for solar in the city Capacity**

1. Medford City Hall Annex public safety parking lot, 411 W. Eighth St. 35kW
2. U.S. Cellular Community Park shop, 300 Lowery Lane 2.4kW
3. Medford Regional Waste Water property, 1100 Kirtland Road, Central Point 100kW
4. Medford City Service Center, 821 N. Columbus Ave. 80kW
5. Medford Fire Station No. 6, 3700 Barnett Road 3kW
6. City Parking Garage, Sixth Street and Riverside Avenue 10kW

Total capacity: 230kW of electricty

Fast fact: One kilowatt is equal to 10 100-watt light bulbs.