

Ocean Township may hire third consultant for Pinelands solar project

By LEE PROCIDA Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 |

OCEAN TOWNSHIP - The township may hire a third consultant for its proposed project to install solar panels on the local landfill, officials said after a meeting Tuesday with the New Jersey Pinelands Commission about the project.

The afternoon discussion was a follow-up to a Sept. 29 meeting in which the commission gave the township a list of questions it needed answered before signing an agreement with to allow the project to proceed.

Afterward, Deputy Mayor Joseph Lachawiec said the township may seek a firm in January that specializes in similar energy projects to analyze the financial feasibility of the plan. Experts from the Atlantic County Utilities Authority and Pepco Energy Services already are working with the township on the plan.

"In my opinion, they are supportive of the concept of alternative energy in the Pinelands," Lachawiec said of the commission after the meeting. "However, one of the problems is there are no rules or regulations in place for a site in the Pinelands."

Commission spokesman Paul Leakan explained that while the commission allows solar panels on homes in the Pinelands National Reserve, in its most protected areas it prohibits large-scale projects that would constitute an industrial use, as the township project would.

That is because the commission wants to be sure the added infrastructure necessary, such as transformers, substations and the alteration of utility poles, will not affect the surrounding forest or alter the stormwater-management controls. It also needs to make sure installation of the panels will not damage the landfill's impermeable cap.

He said the commission's job is to protect the forest and drinking water, and while it recognizes the importance of solar panels, "it's just a matter of how can these goals work in concert without affecting each other negatively."

There were few specific details available from those involved immediately after the meeting, except that the township's attorneys were told it would not be able to install new utility poles on the site and that the two parties would meet again in the first quarter of next year.

The township and Pepco, its contractor for the project, initially were trying to expedite it in order for Pepco to get federal renewable grants to subsidize the project before they were set to expire at the end of this year.

Those grants were renewed this fall for 2010, though, Lachawiec said, and still will be sought to help fund the nearly \$40 million, 5.67-megawatt plant.

"It's going to take a while to develop all the correct rules and regulations," Lachawiec said.

Contact Lee Procida:

609-457-8707

LProcida@pressofac.com

© 1970-2009 Press of Atlantic City Media Group