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## Westport nears deal for solar farm at landfill



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**Aerial view of solar farm at Dartmouth's closed landfill. Westport is poised to launch such a project at its own capped landfill.**

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**Bruce Burdett (mailto:bburdett@eastbaynewspapers.com)**

A solar farm should sprout from the old town dump by next year at this time.

Consultant Power Management, the Westport Energy Committee and Town Administrator Tim King have narrowed to one their search for a company to install and operate the solar array and will present that favorite to the Board of Selectmen next week.

“Our search drew interest from a number of companies and we believe we have a good candidate,” said Energy Committee Chairman Tony Connors.

Some eight to ten companies visited Westport for a look at the site — the capped landfill at the corner of Hix Bridge Road and Route 88. Three of those firms then put in bids.

“They were all decent bids” from which the frontrunner, whose name he declined to reveal until the Selectmen have had a chance to take a look, was selected.

Under the idea being pursued, Westport would provide the property — the long-capped dump — but the solar company would foot the bills for installation and upkeep of the solar equipment.

Westport would not receive the electrical energy produced by the farm, Mr. Connors said. That will go into the electrical grid and likely be sold to another municipality.

Under the proposal offered by the bidder (and Mr. Connors said all three bidders had similar proposals), Westport would receive rent under a 20-year lease for the landfill. The town would also receive a one-time payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) from the solar farm company in the amount of around \$20,000 to \$25,000. Since the property is town-owned, it presently produces no tax revenue for Westport.

Mr. Connors said there would also be income from town permits and fees, “which can be considerable when you are talking about a couple million dollar project.”

If selectmen give the bidder the go-ahead, there will be permitting work and then site preparation.

Because the landfill is capped “and that cap must not be broken, the couple-acre capped area will be covered with a rock layer to provide a firm footing for the solar panels.

If all goes well, the under one-megawatt solar farm should be installed and ready to produce electricity by next fall.

After so many years of effort — first with wind power and then solar, it’s great to see the project reach this stage, Mr. Connors said.

“It has always gnawed at me that we didn’t have something like this at the landfill.”

Because it is a capped landfill, “the land is completely unusable in any other way and that’s part of what makes this so satisfying.”

Tax credit guidelines also smile on projects that make good use of land such as this, he added.

At the end of the 20-year lease, the company and Westport would have three options under the contract being considered.

The company could take the solar panels down and remove the equipment, the company and Westport could sign a new deal, or Westport could buy the solar equipment.

Westport won't receive the power generated here — that will go to some other town in an arrangement similar to one Westport agreed to last year that brings the town power generated by solar farms in Freetown and Carver.

Under a 20-year deal organized by the Energy Committee and approved by town meeting voters last year, the town buys solar credits from Borrego Solar Systems, a firm that designs, installs and manages large scale solar energy systems around the country. One of these is at the Dartmouth Landfill — others are in Carver, Berkley, Plimpton, Mashpee, Freetown and elsewhere.

The town has agreed to buy a set amount of energy each year and in return is protected from price spikes — rates may not increase by more than 2 percent a year for the life of the pact.

“It would have been nice if the electricity generated at the landfill stayed in Westport but it really amounts to the same thing,” Mr. Connors said.

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**Mike Rego**

Mike Rego has worked at East Bay Newspapers since 2001, helping the company launch The Westport Shorelines. He soon after became a Sports Editor, spending the next 10-plus years in that role before taking over as editor of The East Providence Post in February of 2012. To contact Mike to submit information, suggest story ideas or photo opportunities, etc., email [mrego@eastbaynewspapers.com](mailto:mrego@eastbaynewspapers.com).

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