

Solar power project approved for 13 school sites, district office

Chino Valley Unified School District expects to save more than \$20 million over the next 20 years by installing solar power fixtures at 13 school sites and the district office.

The solar fixtures will be installed atop shaded parking structures built at the following sites: Chaparral, Rhodes, Walnut Avenue, and Wickman elementary schools; Cal Aero Preserve Academy (K-8); Magnolia and Ramona junior high schools; Ayala, Buena Vista, Chino, Chino Hills, and Don Lugo high schools; the Adult School; and the district office in Chino.

The shade structures will also provide LED lighting for the parking areas, an added benefit, said board member Sylvia Orozco.

Engineering and final planning for the project is expected to begin by mid-September for 12 of the sites. Construction and connection to the solar arrays should be completed by November 2016.

The Board of Education approved a contract Aug. 13 with SolarCity, Inc. of San Mateo to install the solar fixtures at no cost to the district. The company will sell the electricity produced by the solar project to the district at a fixed rate of 9.7 cents per kilowatt for 20 years. The fixed rate will protect the district from fluctuations in the utility market, according to SolarCity representative Bret Crochet, who spoke at the Aug. 13 board meeting.

The 9.7 cents rate is lower than that charged by Southern California Edison, said Greg Stachura, assistant superintendent of facilities and planning.

SolarCity guarantees the district 19,500 kilowatts per year, but expects to generate 28,000 kilowatts, Mr. Crochet said. As a comparison, an average home in California uses 6,684 kilowatts per year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The company, which is chaired by Tesla Motors and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, will maintain the equipment and pay the difference to the district if the solar panels do not produce electricity at the rate specified in the contract.

In addition, SolarCity will install 12-by-12-foot banks of lithium batteries next to electrical equipment at 12 of the sites. The batteries will charge between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and will discharge electricity in the evening. The batteries will not be installed at Buena Vista Continuation High and the Adult School because the savings there did not justify the cost of the battery installation, said Carla Kleinjan, sustainability coordinator for the school district.

At the end of the contract, the district can purchase the solar fixtures at fair market value, negotiate a contract extension, or request removal of the fixtures at no cost. Mr. Crochet said the solar panels will continue to produce electricity after 20 years, but at a rate of about 90%.

SolarCity was selected for the project from five firms. Those companies were rated on experience, qualifications and price per kilowatt by a district employee committee comprised of Mr. Stachura, Ms. Kleinjan, construction coordinator Bill Childress, construction coordinator, and director of transportation Martin Silveira.