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Town Moves Closer to Installing Solar on Capped Landfill

The landfill behind Needham's Recycling and Transfer Station was closed and capped in 1997. Over the years, alternative uses for the ten acres on top of the landfill have been explored. A 2004 study concluded that a number of conditions, including high winds, limited parking, and access restrictions related to operations of the RTS, make the site unsuitable for active recreation. More recently attempts were made to locate a wind turbine on the site, but technical concerns resulted in termination of these plans.

The Solar Energy Exploratory Committee (SEEC), appointed last fall by the Board of Selectmen, has concluded that the best use for the property is to partner with a developer to place solar panels on the landfill.

The committee has spent the past nine months exploring whether solar panels on Needham's landfill would be beneficial to the Town, and looking at what other towns are doing. Dozens of other Massachusetts communities have or are in the process of siting solar panels on capped landfills. The nearest installation is the fifteen acre site on Canton's landfill that is expected to generate 4 to 5 MW of power.

The Committee estimates that there is enough space on the top of Needham's landfill to generate 2 -3 MWs of power. That is equal to about 20% to 25% of the electricity used to power the Town's municipal buildings and schools.

The Committee proposes leasing the property to a developer who will take on the costs of developing and operating the solar facility. In exchange, the Town will receive a lease payment, tax payments, and a discount on energy purchased for use by municipal and school facilities. The project could receive approximately \$150,000 year in value from this type of arrangement.

In an effort to create more clean energy options that reduce the generation of greenhouse gasses, the state and federal government have put in place a number of incentive programs which mandate that electric utilities purchase a certain amount of power from clean energy sources and make it attractive for developers to build solar facilities. Because the programs have been successful in helping the Commonwealth reach its goal of generating 1% of power from renewable sources, some of the incentive programs will be ending soon.

The Solar Energy Exploratory Committee has developed and released a request for proposals from developers, which are due back in October. The committee hopes to recommend a developer before the end of the year. Town Meeting approval of six warrant articles is required at the November 4, 2013 Special Town Meeting to enable the project to move forward. Additional information is located at <http://needhamma.gov/index.aspx?NID=3076>.