

Lake Tahoe Airport may become solar site



The executive hangar at Lake Tahoe Airport and others could have solar panels as soon as next summer. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe could save about \$1.28 million in electric bills over the course of 25 years if solar panels were installed at Lake Tahoe Airport.

That is the projection by Bay Area-based Staten Solar. Representatives from the company gave the City Council an overview on Sept. 19 of what a solar field at the airport would mean.

The firm would install all of the equipment and maintain it for the life of the contract, and would secure all the permits.

Scott DuBois with Staten Solar said of the sun here “it’s

raining free energy on us” and now is the time to take advantage of it.

Solar systems have been installed in other mountain regions, so snow load factors as well as the time it takes for the snow to melt on panels have all been studied. Panels have also been installed at airports, so this is something the FAA is familiar with signing off on.

There would be no outlay of cash from the city. The only expense might be if more insurance is required on the hangars.

The use of solar is part of the recently adopted airport master plan. Going forward with this would also help the city attain its goal of using 100 percent renewable energy by 2032.

The local system is proposed to be a 300 kilowatt unit.

Instead of the city buying power from Liberty it would be buying it from Staten.

The savings stated are projected by Staten and have not been independently analyzed by city staff. The company used the city’s current bill, which is about \$50,000 a year at the airport, with projected rate increases from Liberty and then what it projects the cost of its service will be.

So, there is no guarantee of these cost savings.

The estimate is 90 percent of the airport’s electrical needs could be provided by the solar.

City Councilman Tom Davis was concerned about having equipment for so long when technology is always changing. DuBois said the most substantive changes lately are to software, which will be updated as needed.

DuBois said his firm has had positive conversations with Liberty Utilities.

Liberty Utilities did not respond to *Lake Tahoe News'* questions about this proposal.

Staten wants to work with South Lake Tahoe to potentially put solar in on other city owned buildings, like the fire stations. It is talking to other businesses in town, like Heavenly Mountain Resort and Tahoe Mountain Lab.

Tuesday's presentation was just that and not an action item. However, the council members expressed interest in having more serious talks with Staten to put solar on the airport hangars.