

## **GMP going solar**

By HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN, Reformer Staff

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WESTMINSTER -- Green Mountain Power wants to install one of the state's largest solar power systems at its new facility in Westminster.

GMP has an application in with the Westminster Planning Commission to erect the 58 kilowatt solar collector that will provide about two-thirds of the energy for the company's new maintenance and office building on Westminster Heights Road.

The solar collector will not be a major part of the utility company's power supply, but will rather be net metered, which means energy will be used to run the building while extra energy produced will be sold back into the grid.

The technology used at the GMP facility is relatively common, explained Kevin McCollister, a project manager at GroSolar, the Vermont company that is engineering the new power system.

But McCollister said that when the system is completed it will be one of the largest collectors at a commercial office space in Vermont.

"There are much larger systems in other parts of the country, but for Vermont it's big," McCollister said. "It will be interesting for other businesses to see."

A number of recent changes in how Vermont meters and funds alternative energy projects helped spur the new solar collector in Westminster.

The project is being partially paid for with the Vermont Clean Energy Development Fund, which was established in 2005 between the state and Entergy Nuclear Vermont when the company applied for its dry cask storage.

Federal tax credits also helped encourage the project.

Those tax credits were extended in the \$700 billion federal bailout bill that was authorized by Congress Friday and McCollister said he hoped the Westminster project would become a model for other businesses in New England that want to consider changing over to solar power.

"It's a new thing in Vermont for GMP and others to be able to use clean energy like this," McCollister said. "If those federal tax credits are extended it will help keep it viable for other commercial businesses to consider these options."

The 13,500 square foot GMP building in Westminster was built using a number of green building techniques, including recycled rubber tires on the floor, natural light and low flush toilets.

The building is the third largest for the utility company in the state and serve customers in most of Windham County.

GMP operation project manager Rebecca Towne said the company had planned to install the solar collector and was excited to get all of the permits to move the project forward.

"We saw this as the next step in making this building as green and efficient as possible and making as low an impact as possible," Towne said.

The 200-by-50 foot solar collector will be ground mounted and will be installed in the front of the building.

Towne hopes to start construction this winter and have the collectors up and running before spring.

"We want to show Vermont what a large solar installation will look like at a large building," said Towne. "We hope projects like this will be a big part of our energy future."

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