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WINSTED

Solar energy farm to offer town a windfall in savings

A small solar energy farm on Platt Hill Road is expected to benefit the town in more ways than one.

The land where the farm is being built was purchased a year ago by Kirt Mayland of Avon through his business, Reservoir Road Holdings, an environmental consulting and solar development company. Mayfield said he usually buys old gravel pits and brownfields, and leases them to solar companies, but the Platt Hill Road property presented a unique opportunity.

About 15 years ago, a controversial 26-unit subdivision was proposed there. Neighbors were opposed to it and the developers appealed twice in court to overturn rejections by local boards. The subdivision never happened when the economy collapsed in 2008.

Mayland said he bought the 106 wooded acres for \$325,000. He gave nearly 80 acres to Winchester Land Trust and is leasing 23 acres to Lodestar Energy, an Avon-based renewable energy company. Fourteen acres have been clear cut and solar panels will cover 8 acres.

The solar panels will generate power into the electric grid and Eversource Energy will grant the town energy credits that will reduce its electric bills by \$25,000 per year over 20 years, Mayland said.

“This is a good project for the town,” he said. “There’s a lot of controversy about where to locate renewable sources of energy. So I look to buy property that won’t get anybody mad. This project requires very little tree cutting, won’t disturb the habitat, there are no neighbors, while at the same time creates clean energy and no one can see it.”

Jen Perga, president of the land trust, said members might create a trail on the donated land, which is near Little Red School House. There’s a stream and a lot of wildlife there, as well as state land nearby and 9 more acres of trust land across the street.

“It’s a really, nice big parcel,” she said. “It increases our acreage from about 500 to (nearly 580). So it really makes a big difference.”

Connecticut Siting Council approved the energy farm in June. Lodestar is permitted to build a 1.99-megawatt solar photovoltaic facility.

Michelle Bachman, the council’s executive director, has estimated one megawatt could power 750 to 1,000 homes. The Lodestar project could generate electricity for 1,500 to 2,000 homes.

— Kurt Moffett