

WESTFORD

## Solar project taking shape

Groton Road array gets state financing

September 04, 2011 | By John Laidler, Globe Correspondent

Two development companies have begun a \$23 million project to convert a vacant industrial site in Westford into a solar farm that could generate enough electricity to power about 600 homes.

Workers are preparing the 22-acre site for the planned 4.5-megawatt facility, which will consist of an array of 14,000 ground-mounted solar panels on Groton Road, near Route 3.

The project is being carried out by Cathartes Private Investments, a Boston-based real estate and energy development company, in partnership with Nexamp Inc., a North Andover solar developer. The state is helping finance the project by issuing \$5.8 million in low-interest bonds through a federal program.

Jim Goldenberg, a principal at Cathartes, said the project is being carried out in two phases, with half the solar panels due to be installed by the end of this year, allowing the facility to begin operation, and the other half by the middle of next year.

The project, which the developers say will create the largest privately owned solar farm in Massachusetts, was spurred by provisions in the state's 2008 Green Communities Act that helped make solar energy initiatives more affordable, Goldenberg said.

"We think this is really the first commercial project of its size to be financed, and we are really excited to be the first out of the box," he said. "We are looking forward to doing more projects. We think it's really an exciting sector."

The Green Communities Act provisions, Goldenberg said, include one that allows developers to sell at retail prices the credits they receive from supplying power to the regional grid. The law also requires utilities to generate a minimum percentage of their power from solar energy, opening the way for solar operators to sell certificates that can be used to meet the requirement.

Robert S. Jefferies, chairman of the Westford Board of Selectmen, said the town welcomes the solar field.

“We like green projects,” Jefferies said, noting that Westford this spring installed a solar array on the roof of Stony Brook School and is considering placing an array on the roof of Westford Academy, the town’s high school.

Angus Jennings, the town’s director of land use management, said the Groton Road site is a former quarry zoned for industrial uses.

“It’s been cleared for many years and it’s something of a wasteland ... So we felt this was a very beneficial reuse of underutilized industrial land,” he said.

“The town strongly supports renewable energy, and the operations of this facility will have a minimal impact on local infrastructure and services while generating new tax revenues,” Jennings added. “So there is a lot of support for it.”

Jennings said the only local approval required was a storm-water management permit, which the Planning Board granted last fall.

Although the town backs the project, selectmen last fall opted not to enter into an agreement with the developers to purchase power from the facility.

“We are involved in other power purchasing agreements and it just ... wasn’t going to do that much for us financially,” Jefferies said. “And it wasn’t a make or break for them, by any means.”

[http://articles.boston.com/2011-09-04/news/30113109\\_1\\_solar-farm-solar-project-solar-array](http://articles.boston.com/2011-09-04/news/30113109_1_solar-farm-solar-project-solar-array)