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## Oak Park adds solar panel, I-GO charging stations

Oak Park continued its ongoing green streak Monday night.

Three weeks after becoming the first municipality in America to commit to making 100 percent green electric power available to residents and small businesses, the village board approved two agreements intended to further the development of cutting edge green technology in the village.

Trustees approved a \$765,000 contract with Solar Service Inc. to install solar panels on the Avenue parking garage. They also approved a seven-year agreement with the I-GO electric car sharing company and 350 Green Inc. to construct two solar-powered car charging stations in the village.

### 'A legacy project'

Most of the \$765,680 purchase and installation for the Avenue garage solar panel installation would be paid for by a state grant of \$568,035. The village would pay \$191,645.

The solar panels are estimated to produce 102 kilowatt hours of electricity each year for the 25-year life of the technology. The village's \$191,000 investment is projected to be returned in about 15 years. Over the 25-year life, it's expected to return a profit of at least \$250,000.

"This is the type of investment that needs to be made to make solar more affordable and (utilized)," said Oak Park Sustainability Manager KC Poulos. The green technology also promises to have a major environmental impact.

Solar Service's Joe Gordon said the solar installation was "akin to planting 25 acres of trees every year, and taking 75 tons of CO2 out of the environment."

Oak Park Public Works Director John Weilebnicki said staff selected the best contractor, not the cheapest. Solar Service, he said, installed the solar water heating system at the public works center.

"It wasn't the cheapest, but it would serve us best," he said. "Sometimes the lowest bid isn't the best."

Inverters will change the electricity gathered from the solar panels from direct current to alternate current, which will then be transferred to the garage's utility box.

Any unused electricity will be "net-metered" back into the ComEd electric grid for credit.

Gordon said the installation will be integrated "seamlessly onto garage columns and structure," of the parking garage.

Gordon called the solar installation a "legacy project." The steel understructure will almost certainly outlast any technology it supports. When new technology is installed, "you have the same structure. It keeps the costs down."

"If we adequately maintain the garage, we may very well see that 75 years," Village President David Pope said.

"Oh, absolutely," said Village Engineer Jim Budrick.

Gordon estimated a completion date of late February or early March, leading Pope to wonder how he was certain about conducting construction during Chicago's winter months.

"We're going to make it work," Gordon replied.

"He seems pretty good about predicting Chicago winters," Pope deadpanned, looking at Weilebnicki. "You may want to give him a call and see how much salt we need."