

BLP moving forward with community solar project

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MARQUETTE - The Marquette Board of Light and Power has unanimously approved contracting with Michigan Energy Options to assist in developing its community solar project.

The BLP on Wednesday awarded the nearly \$17,900 contract to MEO to provide website development, marketing and sales, legal services and community presentations.

Dave Lynch, the BLP's assistant director of utility operations, said MEO has provided the same services for other Michigan utilities and is currently working with the city of Lansing on a similar solar project.

"They've got experience in doing this and rolling it out, and the legal contractual document is very important to allow our customers the tax benefits that are available to them," Lynch said.

The solar project will be funded entirely by those customers who purchase panels.

Lynch said several downstate firms earlier this week requested the BLP consider them as suppliers of the panels, which could result in lower costs to consumers.

"The number of panels that are enrolled will drive the cost of the project," he said. "The more panels we put up, the cheaper it's going to be."

The BLP board at its Jan. 12 meeting awarded a \$6,500 contract to Utility Financial Solutions to design a community solar rate structure, which is expected to be complete by the end of February.

In December, a roughly 8,000-square-foot wooded parcel to the west of the BLP offices at 2200 Wright St. was clear cut to make room for the solar garden.

The site could hold around 500 panels, Lynch said, though additional locations have been identified if more panels are purchased and extra space is needed.

"We're trying to find spots that we have facilities close by so the interconnection cost will be as low as possible," Lynch said earlier this month.

The locations include a small area directly to the east of the BLP office and one to the north of the office near the Dead River. Another larger site is to the west of the river and north of Marquette County Road 550 near the Tourist Park Basin.

Lynch said more than 90 people have expressed interest in the project as of mid-January.

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