

Partner in Beaverton solar project declares bankruptcy



This diagram prepared for the Beaverton City Council's January 2014 vote, shows the Sexton Mountain reservoir with the solar panels depicted on top, all surrounded by a fence. Murray Boulevard is to the right of the image and 16 houses directly border the reservoir. (City of Beaverton)



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A key partner with the City of Beaverton in a solar energy project at Sexton Mountain filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last week.

Two critics of the Sexton Mountain project say they warned city officials as long ago as last year and as recently as earlier this month that **Missouri-based SunEdison** was headed for bankruptcy. A city official, however, issued a statement Monday evening discounting any financial or operational threat to the city.

In January 2014, Beaverton city councilors approved a contract with a Denver-based company to install nearly 1,700 solar panels on an open stretch of city land topping Sexton Mountain Reservoir off Southwest Murray Boulevard. A \$355,420 **Energy Trust of Oregon** grant helped pay for the project, which includes solar panels arrayed on 2.1 acres of the city's 5-acre property.

Under the contract, the city's solar partner would operate and maintain the installed equipment while the city would sell energy produced. At the end of the contract, expected to be 25 years, the city will have the opportunity to buy the solar panels or have them removed at the operator's expense.

That partner -- Oak Leaf Energy Partners of Denver -- sold its interest in the project last summer to SunEdison, transferring the terms of the contract, said energy consultant Robert McCullough of **McCullough Research** in Portland.

McCullough said the project is not cost effective and never will be. Now, he said, Beaverton should exercise its contractual option to leave the project in the event of a bankruptcy declaration.

That's what Sexton Mountain-area resident Joe Gibbons hopes will happen. Gibbons, a retired General Accounting Office auditor, said the project has gobbled up valuable public greenspace.

On top of that, "this project can't stand on its own two feet financially," he said.

Beaverton city attorney Bill Kirby issued a statement Monday evening saying the city was monitoring SunEdison's bankruptcy.

"With regard to the Sexton Mountain solar array, the project is fully installed," Kirby's statement says. "The city is not owed any money nor does it have an equity stake in the company. There is not a lot of work that needs to be done to operate and maintain a solar array once it has been fully installed. As a result, the city does not expect any significant impacts from the company's reorganization."

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