

Solar Project Stalls After Tied Vote From Alton Committee

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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ALTON - After a tied vote of 3-3, Alton aldermen prevented the city from entering a \$626,512 loan agreement for a solar project at the city's Public Works facility. Concerns were raised about using funds from the city's "emergency" accounts to secure a loan to finance the project, which now faces an uncertain future.

Deputy Director of Planning & Development Andi Campbell Yancey said Illinois currently offers financial incentives for solar installations under the "Solar For All"

program - but to participate in the program, the city would need to take out a loan with a term of at least 12 months. Once the loan has been repaid, she said the city will receive a grant which, when paired with federal solar incentives, would cover about 95% of the project costs.

Yancey also said the solar project would benefit the city with “projected savings” of about \$48,000 to \$52,000 in annual energy costs, which would amount to roughly \$1.4 million in total savings over the lifespan of the solar energy arrays.

City Comptroller Debbie Dunlap said the city’s General Funds “reserve” account is essentially split into two identically-named accounts, one used as a “savings” account and one as an “investment” account. She originally proposed securing the loan by using the reserve savings funds as collateral, but following a lack of support from city officials, she suggested using the reserve investment funds instead.

Alderman Raymond Strebel expressed concern that the city’s “reserve” accounts were originally established for emergency use only.

“They were established as emergency response accounts - that’s what they were intended for, that was the dedication by the authors of it,” Strebel said. “They wanted it to be used only for emergencies, not for collateral, and that’s where I oppose your logic.

“I think this is a beautiful program, but I just will never vote in favor of tapping the emergency fund for anything other than a response.”

Dunlap later said she saw this as an opportunity to put Alton “on the map” while saving the city money.

“To me, this is an opportunity to make money and to put this city on the map as a forward, progressive-type city,” she said. “Really, you’re investing an extremely small amount of money financially to get the opportunity in 18 months to be saving \$50,000 a year.”

Yancey later indicated that one of the city’s fire stations and a police building are also eligible for the same kind of solar incentive program, so if they were to secure this project at the Public Works facility, there would be opportunities for additional solar projects at those other facilities.

Alderman David Gan amended the motion to officially change the use of the General Fund reserve “savings” account to the General Fund reserve “investment” account - his amendment passed on a vote of 4-2 with Alderman Strebel and Alderwoman Carolyn MacAfee voting against it.

The resolution to approve the \$626,512 loan agreement for the solar project ultimately failed with a tied vote of 3-3; Alderwoman Betsy Allen, Alderwoman MacAfee, and Alderman Strebel voted against the agreement. Alderwoman Stephanie Elliott was absent from the meeting.

Following its failure to pass, Alderman John Meehan asked what would happen to the solar project going forward. After additional discussion with financial institutions, one of the aldermen would need to present a new resolution which would be considered and voted on at a future meeting.

A full recording of the Feb. 26, 2024 Alton Committee of the Whole meeting is available at the top of this story, on the [Riverbender.com Facebook page](#), or on [Riverbender.com/video](#).