

Green Notes: Weekly tips for reducing your carbon footprint from First United Methodist's Green Team

First UMC Trustees Support Solar Panel Project

Members of First Church's Board of Trustees met with Green Team representatives and SBS Solar general manager Ralph Walters this week to review details of a proposed solar installation atop the Education Annex.

The hour-long discussion ended with trustees unanimously endorsing the project and giving the go-ahead to engineering work and placement on SBS Solar's installation schedule for late summer/early fall.

The array would include 66 solar modules producing a minimum of 27,060 watts – enough to provide 80 percent of First UMC's electrical use. With solar power, the church would save at least \$500 a month on its power bill – money that could go to other obligations.

Walters said the state-of-the-art panels would be fitted with optimizers that sync each unit's production with the sun's movement across the sky. As the shadow of First Church's tower fell on different panels, the optimizers would switch production to panels that were not in the shadow, increasing the entire system's efficiency.

These panels also generate electricity from both sides, an innovation that increases the array's production by about 15 percent, Walters said. "We want to maximize every square inch of that system."

In addition, the panels would sit on ballasted roof-mount structures designed to withstand 100 mph gusts, in deference to the Hellgate Canyon winds that regularly wallop downtown Missoula.

Total project cost would be \$66,175.

At Wednesday's meeting with trustees, Green Team members reported that the project plan calls for First Church to own the system free and clear from Day 1. With Walters' help, the Green Team will apply for a NorthWestern Energy renewable energy grant of \$46,322. Deadline for that submission is May 1. Recipients are announced in August, and any who aren't funded can reapply by Nov. 1.

NorthWestern wants to see a 70-30 cost split with its grant applicants, so another \$18,353 must come from donations by First Church members and a possible renewable energy grant from the Methodist Church's Mountain Sky Conference. Finally, SBS Solar would donate \$1,500 of its time and design work.

As of Wednesday, First Church members had pledged \$16,250 to the solar panel project. That leaves \$2,103 to raise by May 1. We hope you will help us reach that goal. Make your pledge to First Church's solar panel project by contacting Green Team co-chair Jim Gillison at (406) 546-1359 or by emailing james.gillison@msn.com.