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A place in the sun

Medical building to become city's first solar site to connect to Loveland's grid

By Ann Depperschmidt
 The Daily Reporter-Herald

A medical office building's solar-powered electric system will be the first in Loveland to produce a portion of its own electricity while also connecting to the city's electric grid.

And that move has paved the way for a city proposal that would pay customers for extra electricity they supply back into the grid.

"Right now, our rates are pretty low," said Mary Wyatt, utility conservation coordinator for the city. Installing solar electric systems "is not so much an economic decision as it is an environmental one. As technology evolves, hopefully that will change."

The Sundance Professional Centre, a 19,230-square-foot office building under construction on the northeast corner of North Lincoln Avenue and East 29th Street, will have the city's first interconnected solar electric system.

For now, the system won't produce enough electricity to supply back into the grid. But the office building's solar-power system, coupled with federal regulations, has prompted utility officials to draft a proposal that would require the city to pay the customer for electricity that customer supplied to the city. The City Council should review that proposal in August.

Dr. Ted Mioduski, owner of the building, and his dental practice partner, Dr. Nicole Ferrara, decided to build a LEED-certified building to house their practice and other businesses that will lease space there.

A LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — certification means the building meets certain energy-efficiency standards. Once it meets the certification requirements, it will join Medical Center of the Rockies and Porter Industries as the only LEED-certified buildings in Loveland. The builders of Rangeview III, an office building slated to open soon in Centerra, have applied for the designation.

As part of earning that certification, Sundance Professional Centre will have a photovoltaic solar electric system that will connect to the city's utility grid. The system will generate about 2 percent of the building's electricity, said Alison Mason, principal of Fort Collins-based SunJuice Solar, which installed the system last week.

The building is wired for additional solar panels, so as technology improves, crews can add to the system.

"One day this could be self-sufficient," Mioduski said.

Mason said the system, which has 20 solar panels attached to a 10-foot-by-35-foot awning, is paving the way for other builders in Loveland to learn about how an interconnected solar power



Ilan Levy, working with SunJuice Solar, installs photovoltaic solar panels on the Sundance Professional Centre, a medical office building on the northeast corner of North Lincoln Avenue and West 29th Street. The solar power system will be the first in Loveland to connect to the city's utility grid and has prompted city utility officials to propose policy changes to accommodate the increasing popularity of renewable energy. **Reporter-Herald/Heather A. Longway-Burke**

system works.

“A lot of us are aware that buildings need to conserve energy,” she said. “This is the next step — buildings need to actually produce their own energy.”

But installing such a system is still expensive compared with traditional practices, Mioduski said. And unless the city starts offering more green-building incentives, installing solar electric systems will be a tough sell, he said.

“But if we don’t do something, what’s going to get the ball rolling?” he said.

How solar works

Passive: A set of design principles that maximize solar power to create an energy-efficient building that produces most of its own heating and cooling.

Thermal: A system of collectors, storage tanks, piping, pumps and controls and other to produce heat from sunshine.

Electric (Photovoltaics): A solar array that produces electricity from sunshine. The system may be connected to the electric grid and feed excess solar electricity into the grid during the day and draw electricity from the grid at night. The system also may have batteries to store electricity during the day to use at night.

Source: Fort Collins-based SunJuice Solar, www.sunjuicesolar.com.

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