

Here comes the sun

Grant-funded solar panels to provide heat and power for Sandusky city greenhouse

By **JASON SINGER**

singer@sanduskyregister.com

SANDUSKY

The city's greenhouse will soon be even greener.

Using a \$64,000 renewable energy grant, Sandusky will add the largest array of solar panels in north-central Ohio to the roof of its greenhouse by the end of September.

The improvements continue the facility's incredible four-year transformation from a money-guzzling pit to the most efficient building in Sandusky.

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Register photo/LAURA WOOLF

Kim Jachym waters impatiens Wednesday at the Sandusky city greenhouse.



Register photo/JASON WERLING

Heat-retention curtains were installed at Sandusky's city greenhouse about 10 years ago to help defray heating costs. The greenhouse workers also attach bubble wrap to the windows to retain heat.

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GREENHOUSE

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The solar panels also provide a milestone on the city's slow march toward a more eco-friendly and efficient government. In addition to the solar panels, Sandusky is working on installing two wind turbines at the wastewater treatment plant, and planning a geothermal program for one of the city's older neighborhoods.

"We've got to change," city commissioner Dave Waddington said, who helped make the solar panels a priority. "Everybody thinks the oil and coal (will) last forever."

Edison Wind and Solar will install the solar array. They could begin working on it as early as next week.

The city won a \$64,000 renewable energy grant from the Ohio Department of Development last week, which will pay for nearly half of the solar panels.

It will pay for an additional \$70,000 in costs using its capital projects fund, said Hank Solowiej, the city's finance director.

The solar array will supply 70 percent of the greenhouse's energy, said David Miller, president of Edison Wind and Solar. It will also eliminate more than 200 tons of carbon-dioxide from going into the air every year.

The renewable energy grant money

actually comes from Ohioans' energy bills.

The state takes a few cents from each energy bill, Miller said, and puts it into these grants to fund alternative energy projects. So Sandusky residents will essentially get the money back they've already paid on their electric bills.

"So that's a win-win," he said. "And when you consider environmental improvement — the reduction of (carbon-dioxide) going into the air — that's a win-win-win."

The solar panels are the latest upgrade for the city's greenhouse, which in 2006 was on the verge of being shuttered because it cost too much money.

Since then, the greenhouse has been remodeled with super-efficient acrylic panels, new doors, floors and a new roof.

The decision vote against closing the greenhouse in 2006 "was one of the best I ever made," Waddington said.

The solar array will consist of 78 240-watt solar panels the city will pay off in seven years. The panels are expected to last 40 years.

"It's a pretty great example of something that works right in the city," said State Rep. Dennis Murray Jr., D-Sandusky. "It's not just about the greenhouse, but what the greenhouse supports. The parks, downtown, the flowers — what it provides distinguishes the city from a lot of other places. It's nice to see it come back from the brink."