

Lexington could take advantage of new solar panel technology

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Lexington could pave the way for a new solar photo-voltaic panel installation on Route 128.

"We are anticipating having shovels in the ground in June of next year," said James Cerbone, a project manager for environmental services for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

The state is working with several private engineering companies to potentially install 2,500 feet of solar panels along a stretch of Route 128 in Lexington. The project would produce 825,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, to be fed into the Eversource power structure.

The 166 panels would be located on the south side of Turning Mill Road.

Eric Wood, an operations director for environmental engineering company Ramboll Environ, presented the proposal to the Board of Selectmen at its Oct. 24 meeting. Wood said the technology employed for this project has never been installed in the Western Hemisphere.

"[Lexington] will literally be the first town to approve this," Wood said.

The panels would be installed along a stretch of sound barrier walls on Route 128, land owned by the state of Massachusetts.

Dan Fielding, a public and legislative liaison for MassDOT, said the state does not have to gain permission to install the panels, but will not move forward if Lexington residents are against the installation.

The project is a pilot study for the technology.

"MassDOT is not legally required to get permission for the pilot study, but will not move forward with the pilot study if there is opposition from a majority of the abutters," Fielding said.

"Solar panels serving a dual purpose as noise barriers and power generation have been installed in Europe and Asia successfully," Fielding said. "There are some applications of retrofitted solar noise barriers in France, the Netherlands and Australia at this time, but we are not aware of a retrofit installation on an existing noise barrier, as currently proposed by MassDOT, anywhere in the United States."

The barriers at this location were installed several years ago after residents complained of highway noise. Wood said the addition of solar panels would decrease the noise even further.

"There may actually be a net decrease in sound," Wood said.

Cerbone told the selectmen private companies will pay for the installation. Lexington residents will not have to pay for the panels.

Cerbone also said the town of Lexington could tax the private company using the panels for the use of the land.

The state will be looking to further develop the proposal, and contact abutters about their thoughts on the installation. Cerbone said abutters should expect to be approached before the end of the year.