

Solar power shines bright on top of SARC



By Brock Weir

Hundreds of Aurorans burn off energy under the roof the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex each day, but now what's on top tells a very different story.

On Thursday, Mayor Geoff Dawe and representatives from SolarShare Cooperative cut the ribbon on the new solar installation project on top of the Complex (SARC), a 20-year lease deal that has been over five years in the making.

The SolarShare project at the Complex (SARC) is the co-operative's 36th system in Ontario which is hooked into the Province's electricity grid, pumping the energy generated from the rooftop systems back into the grid as part of Ontario's Feed-In Tariff program.

"The system, located on the roof of a building dedicated to community health and wellbeing is a huge win for Aurora," said SolarShare. "What would have been unused roof space is now leased by SolarShare. Lease payments go to the Town of Aurora, which allocates the revenue to its environmental reserve fund. The fund is used to finance new environmental projects and infrastructure in the community, including putting solar panels on the Town's new Joint Operations Centre (JOC) on Industrial Parkway North."

Indeed, the JOC is the next project SolarShare and the company Solera are eyeing in the Aurora area. In that case, however, it will be a smaller 40w system.

Council first approved leasing the roof of the SARC for solar power generation in 2011. After putting the lease opportunity out to tender, Solera was the ultimate winner and plans were to proceed. However, a number of snags got in the way before the panels could be installed. First, changes in government brought about changes in pricing scales under the Feed-In Tariff (FIT) program. Once that was settled, municipalities like Aurora had to start back at square one. No matter where they were on the timeline, however, the SARC was always the priority location not just due to the sheer size of the roof, but also its proximity to the main road, trees a good distance away, and the fact development around the area is now settled.

"Every one of these projects is a stepping stone towards the sustainable future we all want to get to," said Solera president Leonard Allen. "Why this is a good one is it is a large, high quality building with a high profile and it allows us to do what we do best, which is take a project from conception through to completion. That is where we excel."

"Every one of these projects is important because notwithstanding everything that is going on in the US presently, we are moving towards a future of sustainability, where clean energy is desired by the masses, that is what people want, and this represents an excellent utilization of a municipal facility to power the equivalent of 60 to 70 homes off this rooftop, which would otherwise be unutilized. Buildings consume power and [we] make buildings generators as well."