

# Big solar comes to Dunn County

Pat Eggert Citizen journalist

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**T**he parking lot at the Spring Brook town hall on 810th Street east of Menomonie was full on Thursday, Dec. 8, leaving some to park just past the pile of leftover blacktop. Inside, residents were busy buttonholing representatives from Elk Creek Solar and looking over displays showing the benefits and location of the big (1,600 acre, 300 megawatts) solar photovoltaic project. Over 100 people registered at the desk on the way in.

Back outside, after talking with neighbors, engineers, town officials and others, and perhaps trying some donuts and hot cider, people could open the front door of the town hall and see the golden disc of a nearly full moon rising over flat fields, the main site of the project. On Thursday, there was little to obstruct one's vision for two plus miles to the east, all the way to County Highway H, where the array of solar panels will extend when the project, if all goes as planned, could begin operations in 2025. This is not your rooftop solar panel on a single home.

“The Elk Creek Solar Project will put enough clean energy on the grid to power more than 60,000 Wisconsin homes every year and will be a contributing member to the community for decades to come,” said Dylan Stickney of TED Renewables, developer of the project. Stickney and his colleagues were on hand to answer questions during the four-hour open house.

“Our team is pleased to be working with wonderful landowners and a supportive local community base in Dunn County,” Stickney said. “TED Renewables looks forward to engaging in the regulatory process at the PSCW (Public Service Commission of Wisconsin) while continuing to create long-lasting relationships in Spring Brook and Dunn County.”

Asked about the size of the project, Stickney said it would be “bigger than average” for solar energy projects, but that the industry is going in that direction. And why in Spring Brook? A number of factors came together, Stickney said, including willing landowners and access to an existing high speed transmission line.

Nearly all the land in the project is owned by Doane Limited. Bob Wachsmuth, vice president of the company, was at the open house.

“There is a lot of good coming,” Wachsmuth said about the project. “The meeting was a very good opportunity for neighbors to be informed about the benefits, not only to Doane, but to the town, the school and the county.”

The landowner retains title to the land and signs a 30-year lease, with option for a five-year extension, Wachsmuth said. The land can be returned to agriculture after that time.

Economic benefits, according to the TED representatives, are annual revenues to Spring Brook township of \$500,000, Dunn County of \$700,000 and the Elk Mound Area School District of \$60,000. That is an annual total of \$1,260,000, compared to current annual revenue for all taxing districts of \$10,674.

While construction will provide about 200-300 jobs during the one- to two-year construction process, permanent jobs during the 35 plus life of the project total three to five high paying jobs.

One of the frequently asked questions listed at the open house was “How will the project impact farmland and local agriculture?” The literature said: “... Solar farms help farmers and landowners diversify their income by providing a reliable, drought

resistant revenue stream. This steady income means that farmers are less vulnerable to fluctuations in market prices on their products, uncertain trade regimes and volatile annual weather, thus helping farmers stay in business.”

For more information, check the website, **[elkcreeksolarproject.com](http://elkcreeksolarproject.com)**.