

# Regulators Considering Dominion Solar Proposals

MICHAEL FELBERBAUM, AP Business Writer, Associated Press

Virginia regulators are considering Dominion Virginia Power's proposed plans to increase the use of solar power.

The State Corporation Commission conducted a hearing Wednesday on the Richmond-based energy provider's solar-energy program, which aims to promote alternative power and energy conservation.

One proposal would permit Dominion to build and operate up to 30 megawatts of company-owned solar generation facilities at 30 to 50 locations at an estimated cost of \$111 million.

The utility plans to lease commercial rooftops like big box stores, university athletic centers and industrial sites to install panels that would generate enough electricity to power about 6,000 homes during peak daylight hours. Dominion estimates the project would add around 20 cents to the monthly bill of a typical residential customer.

Another proposal, which is being considered through a separate application process, would allow it to purchase up to 3 megawatts of electricity from customer-owned solar installations.

In opening statements, lawyers for Dominion said the program would be good for customers and Virginia to help evaluate the viability of solar power.

"It's fundamentally important that Dominion understand, study and move forward with the demonstration program if solar-distributed generation is to be used as a bigger part of the Dominion system in the future," attorney Kristian Dahl told the commission.

Members of the public commended Dominion's efforts to promote solar power but called it a small step. Others raised concerns over the cost-effectiveness of solar generation.

"It is critical to move the commonwealth away from the carbon-intensive generation that it has relied upon for over a century and move it toward renewable generation," Rob Marmet, a senior energy policy analyst with the Piedmont Environmental Council, told the commission. "Make no mistake, this is a small program. But (it) will provide the commonwealth with a better understanding of electric and market factors that may impede or drive the solar industry in Virginia."

Allowing Dominion to build the solar power facilities and buy customer-generated electricity helps bring validity to the industry, said Andy Bindea, founder of Waynesboro-based Sigora Solar, which installs solar energy systems for residential

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and commercial customers. In the year and a half it has been in business, the company has completed nearly two dozen installations and sales of \$1.3 million.

"Granted, in the grand scheme of Virginia's energy consumption it is minute, but it is a step in the right direction," Bindea said.

Representatives from the Virginia Attorney General's office said in open statements that it does not oppose the proposal for Dominion to build solar generation facilities because they would add new power generation, enhance Dominion's fuel diversity and provide environmental benefits.

However, the attorney general's office did raise concerns about the program's design and costs. Representatives said the office would prefer that Dominion focus more on buying solar power from customers first because there would be no cost to non-participating customers.

In pre-filed testimony, the commission's staff said regulators could either approve or deny the application outright, or approve it with various changes that would minimize customer costs.

The commission does not have a specific time frame to make a decision, but Dominion is seeking to construct and operate the first portion of the generation sites by the end of 2013.

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