IID briefs: Some on board bleak on future of solar

By ELIZABETH VARIN

Imperial Valley Press Staff Writer

2:38 AM PST, December 24, 2011

Talk over a solar project whose developers want to bypass the Imperial Irrigation District electrical system brought out concerns about the future of solar in some areas of the Imperial Valley on Friday.

Directors Stella Mendoza and Jim Hanks expressed concern over one of the CSolar projects in south Imperial County that is set to send power to San Diego Gas & Electric. Mendoza specifically questioned the direction the IID was going if it were to work out a contract to allow the solar company to tie into the district’s substation and directly out to San Diego, bypassing much of the IID.

“This is new territory for the IID, and frankly I don’t feel it’s the right way to go,” she said, speaking of the negotiations between the solar company, SDG&E and the California energy grid operators.

She was specifically critical of staff who had not gotten around to the issue of a solar tariff that had been proposed at the beginning of the year. That would have been a simpler solution to the problems the district is now facing.

This has been something the board has been going over in closed session for quite a while, said General Manager Kevin Kelley. It specifically deals with an area of the Imperial Valley near Mt. Signal where half a dozen solar facilities have been proposed.

Those projects are proposing to bypass the IID’s facilities, which means the district won’t get any of the benefit of having the solar in the area, he said.

The district will now start to work on a economic development study that will help assess what wheeling fees, or fees placed on companies for the services the district provides by transporting electricity, can be set in place. Until then, an executive order will be brought forward in the coming weeks to put something temporarily in place, he said.

Not all on the board were satisfied with that decision, as directors Mendoza and Hanks voted no to moving forward with contract documents. However, a majority of the board approved allowing staff to...
move forward toward negotiations.

**Biogas purchase questioned**

A purchase that had been approved earlier this week didn’t receive as much support Friday after the district board rescinded and revoted on the purchase of biogas to boost its renewable portfolio.

The approval for buying the biogas from Element Markets Renewable Energy was taken back and reapproved, though one board member changed her vote.

Board President Stella Mendoza said she wasn’t comfortable moving forward with the project because it’s not a clean contract and staff had to bring it back to clarify the decision. She added that she loses some of her trust with staff when they don’t give the appropriate information in the beginning.

The biogas is one of several options to meet renewable energy portfolio standards, said Belen Valenzuela, risk manager for the district. In order to capture all the benefits from the California Air Resources Board to count the project as zero emissions under cap and trade rules, the district needs to get the gas flowing before Dec. 31.

There are some ways to get out of the agreement, though, should the state decide to not allow biogas as a renewable energy, she said.

**SDSU solar power purchase agreement approved**

The solar project that is set to help teach students at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus took a step forward as the Imperial Irrigation District approved a purchase power agreement for the five megawatt facility.

The project by Sol Orchard, that will be located on the university’s Brawley campus, will include three different technologies, including photovoltaic solar and polycrystalline silicon. The final agreement had been negotiated until Thursday night, said Noe Gutierrez, assistant manager for resource planning.

The 25-year agreement will start at $105 a megawatt hour for the first year, increasing each year until it reaches $150.10 in the final year, he said.

The board approved the agreement with a 5-0 vote.

Staff Writer Elizabeth Varin can be reached at evarin@ivpressonline.com or 760-337-3441.

Copyright © 2012, Imperial Valley Press