

Yuba supervisors OK \$10.5 million Chevron solar pact

By [Ben van der Meer/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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To find a solution to aging infrastructure, Yuba County will look to the sky.

Specifically, the sun, which will power solar panels on some county buildings, with the savings to be applied toward upgrading lighting, heating and air conditioning on older county structures.

Yuba County supervisors approved a plan Tuesday evening with Chevron Energy Systems Inc. to lease solar panels for a maximum 18-year period, at a total price tag of \$10.5 million.

After an initial equity payment of \$800,000, the county would pay off the panels at no more than 4.85 percent over a period as short as 16 years.

"Then it'll be completely cash positive for the county, and the savings will come to us," said County Administrator Robert Bendorf in his presentation to the board, noting the savings will probably be socked away in an account to replace the solar panels when they begin to fail after an expected 30-year lifespan.

Supervisor John Nicoletti said he supported the idea, but questioned whether the county's share of tobacco securitization money — being used for the equity payment — might not be put to better use, such as helping the county avoid layoffs.

Mary Jane Griego, the Olivehurst-area supervisor, concurred, saying, "Tomorrow morning, I'm going to hear, 'where did the county get \$10 million to buy that?'"

Bendorf explained the tobacco securitization money could only be spent in specific ways, with the capital improvements inherent in the solar panel plan one of them.

"We're having some really aging infrastructure that costs us a lot to fix," Bendorf said, adding when the county library's air conditioner gave out a few years ago, staff had to bring in ice chests and fans to make conditions bearable.

Heating and air at the library and county courthouse would be gradually replaced as a result of the savings in energy costs from panels on the roof of the county government center in Marysville and the health and human services building in Linda.

Once the panels are paid off, the county would save \$900,000 annually. Annual utility bills are about \$1 million now.

Jeff Small, whose firm, Capitol Public Financing Group, helped put the plan together, said the county will get additional benefit from state credits for improved energy efficiency and reduced carbon footprint for the panels.

Those credits could then be sold to other entities as part of a planned carbon trading system in California.

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