School board discusses solar energy

By DIANE VANCE
Ledger staff writer

Jason Egli, president of EPo Energy, presented information about adding solar energy to district buildings to the Fairfield school board Monday.

"EPo Energy is half-owned by the Porters here in Libertyville," said Egli.

EPo Energy partners with Gexpro to source and design solar systems, he said. Gexpro is a division of Rexel, the largest global electrical distributor. EPo Energy website www.epoenergy.com shows a corporate office in Cedar Falls.

"We offer a single process, turnkey operation," said Egli. "We do the feasibility study and energy audits with your energy provider, to see if it makes sense for the customer.

"Currently, solar energy systems earn a 30 percent federal tax credit on the total cost and Iowa offers a 15 percent credit on top of that," he said.

Since school districts are nonprofits and not eligible for such credits, Egli said other schools have invited private investors to purchase the systems, receive the tax credits and the school district make annual payments to the investor group until the system is paid off.

"We handle the installation," said Egli. "We evaluate, hire and manage quality third-parties."

He said he had talked with Superintendent Art Sathoff and Auxiliary Services Director Fred McElwee and was looking at the middle school for his example of designing a solar energy system in the district.

"Iowa is in the top 16 states for solar production," said Egli. "The equipment has a life of 30 to 40 years and the great thing about solar systems, there's no moving parts to wear out. The cost of solar energy is 3-to-6-cents per kilowatt where you are now paying 9-cents per kilowatt.

"We'd install the system on the middle school roof, from 30,000 to 37,000 square feet of panels, providing a 400 kilowatt system," said Egli. "The system is grid-connected, meaning the school district would get meter credit when it produced more energy than it was using."

He acknowledged the middle school roof is not a bare expanse. It has HVAC units that could be worked around. Solar panels would be weighted with ballast, not anchored to the roof with any nails or screws that would be penetrating through the roof.

"With ballast anchoring, our equipment is tested to handle 120 mph winds and one-inch hail," said Egli.

He said the solar panels have a 10-year workmanship and a 25-year production warranty.

"This presentation is for informational purposes," said McElwee. "Schools are using wind energy, but that has a higher maintenance cost than solar."

Egli said schools could use solar energy as educational tools, also, installing a panel at ground level for student viewing.

"Using dashboards students can see the solar panels producing energy and how the building is using it," he said.