

January 14, 2014

Public Workshop Will Explore “Solar Gardens”

Even with the solar energy industry booming, many people can't get their piece of the sun. Why? Because, among other reasons, they are renters or they don't have unshaded roof space for solar panels.

A public workshop will explore a possible answer to the problem, solar gardens, next Wednesday, Jan. 15, at 7 pm in the Community Chambers of City Hall. The featured speaker will be State Senator Lois Wolk, principal author of Senate Bill 43, a recently enacted law to encourage and facilitate solar gardens. The senator will talk about her reasons for initiating the bill and her hopes for its implementation.

The workshop, which is free, is jointly sponsored by the City of Davis and the Valley Climate Action Center (VCAC), a Davis non-profit which supports the implementation of the city's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

Other speakers include Mark Braly, president of VCAC, and Mitch Sears, the city's sustainability program manager. Braly will talk about the basics of solar gardens, various approaches to funding them, and how they fit into the current Davis FREE study funded by the state Energy Commission. Sears will discuss the city's pioneering solar garden project, PVUSA, and the city's position with regard to implementing Senator Wolk's bill, SB 43.

The bill will require public utilities such as Pacific, Gas, and Electric, to create 600 megawatts of “solar gardens” state wide. Some 20 MW are reserved for Davis. But how this will play out is currently in the hands of the California Public Utilities Commission. Eugene Wilson, a Davis environmental attorney and chair of the Natural Resources Commission, will explain the current proceeding and the position of the environmental groups which he represents.

Invited also is a representative of the Sacramento Municipal Utilities District (SMUD), which operates the region's only solar garden which sells shares to utility customers and gives them credit on their utility bill. The program is called “Solar Shares.”

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