

School District Moves Forward with Energy-Efficiency Project

By BOB DUMAS

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ECG Engineering's Aldo Mazzaferro explains to the board that Ameresco was chosen for the project out of four competing companies. Credits: Bob Dumas

MAHOPAC, N.Y. - The Mahopac Board of Education has approved the hiring of Ameresco, a Newburgh, N.Y.-based renewable energy company, to oversee a multi-million dollar capital improvement project, known as an energy performance contract (EPC), that will renovate the district's school buildings and make them more energy-efficient.

Ron Clamser, Mahopac's assistant superintendent for business, explained that EPCs were created by the state so that school districts can make needed repairs and improve the energy efficiency of their buildings without any increase in taxes to local property owners. School districts must first float a bond equal to the cost of the project and are then reimbursed by the state if the energy savings pays back the cost of the work over an 18-year period.

"We will float a bond for the whole project, but it won't hurt the budget," Clamser said. "But the debt payment has to be lower than annual savings created by the work. Since there is no local cost to the taxpayer no voter approval is necessary."

Ameresco was recommended to the board by ECG Engineering, specialists in energy performance contract evaluation, design, and implementation. ECG Engineering's Aldo Mazzaferro explained to the board that Ameresco was chosen out of four competing companies. Matthew Furdyna, an account executive for Ameresco, then gave the board a PowerPoint presentation on the preliminary project proposal it used to win the job. **The initial plan would cost a little more than \$4.9 million and provide an annual energy savings of \$326,383,** Furdyna said. It would also include nearly \$152,000 in project incentives—rebates from various agencies that are frontloaded and given over the first few years after the project is completed. There would also be 47 percent in building aid from the state, which would cut the overall cost of the EPC nearly in half. However, Clamser said, Ameresco must first complete an energy audit of the district's school buildings before it can present the actual EPC proposal.

"The plan they laid out at the meeting was just a proposal saying, 'we think we can do it for this amount.' It's how they won [the job]," he said. "Now they will do an energy audit and that will dictate the actual costs. We may get into the energy audit and find out something like, maybe solar isn't the best option here. Then the board will have to approve the

real project.” Clamser said he believes that after the energy audit is completed, the cost of the project will be more than the near-\$5 million in Ameresco’s initial proposal.

“My guess is that it will get bigger; they will find more opportunities [for improvements],” he said. “Some other companies [in the bidding process] proposed \$10 million in their initial proposals, but we went with Ameresco because they had a real solid proposal. They didn’t take any risks. For example, some companies said they would put a window film on the windows that would result in savings but the science there is sketchy and an Ameresco didn’t propose that.”

Clamser said the energy audit will begin right away and take about three months to complete. Ameresco’s initial plan calls for *over 7,800 lighting fixtures* throughout the district to be upgraded. Over 99 percent of the fixtures would be converted to state-of-the-art technology. All the windows at Fulmar Elementary would be replaced; all single-pane windows at Mahopac High School would be replaced, and 1,200 square feet of windows would be replaced at Lakeview Elementary. The four main entrance doors at Mahopac Falls Elementary also require replacement and Lakeview Elementary would receive 21 new exterior doors. Furdyna said that new doors would save energy, increase comfort, and still match the existing style of the buildings. The initial plan also called for the entire roof at Fulmar Road Elementary to be replaced and would include a 20-year warranty. It would be well-insulated and help improve the building’s energy efficiency. Additionally, the plan called for two photovoltaic (PV) systems—solar power—to be installed at Fulmar and Lakeview schools, including a performance monitoring system to help educate students.

After the energy audit is completed, Ameresco will devise an updated EPC and present it to the school board for approval. It would then be sent to Albany for approval by the state education department. “Some parts of the project could be approved more quickly than others,” Clamser said. “Some things like window replacement could be approved quickly, while HVAC projects could take longer. They might need more rigorous inspection by state engineers. They look at all design aspects.”

Furdyna told the board that Ameresco does not employ its own contractors such as electricians, HVPC specialists or solar installers, but instead puts those jobs out to bid. He said local contractors are certainly encouraged to apply. Clamser said the district hopes the construction phase will begin in spring of 2017. It would take about a year to complete. “Some of the work would have to be done during the summer when school isn’t in session,” he said.

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