Economy

Dominion Virginia Power to build its first sun energy installation at ODU

Utility will put panels on roof of Norfolk college’s recreation center

An artist’s illustration depicts a roof at Old Dominion University with the panels that will be placed there if the building is found suitable.

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BY PETER BACQUÉ Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Dominion Virginia Power will put its first solar energy installation at Old Dominion University.

The Norfolk school will be the first participant in the company’s Solar Partnership Program, the company said Thursday.

At a cost of about half a million dollars, the Richmond-based utility will install more than 600 photovoltaic panels on the roof of ODU’s Student Recreation Center this summer. Such systems produce electric current directly from sunlight.

The system at ODU can generate 132 kilowatts of electricity that will go onto the power grid, according to Dianne O. Corsello, the company’s manager of customer solutions and new technology.

That would be enough electricity to power about 35 homes.

“This installation will pave the way for us to assess the benefits of solar facilities on our electrical distribution system,” Ken Barker, Dominion Virginia Power’s vice president for customer solutions, said in a statement.

“This new program is already encouraging the growth of solar energy in Virginia,” Barker said, “as many other customers have contacted us and shown interest.”

About 100 customers have expressed interest in taking part in the solar program, Corsello said.

“There are a lot more folks who would like us to partner with them and install solar panels on their rooftop than we have the capability to do, because the program is capped,” she said.

The State Corporation Commission approved the solar demonstration project in November.

Under the $80 million program, Dominion Virginia Power will build and operate up to 30 megawatts of company-owned solar facilities on leased rooftops, or on the grounds of commercial businesses and public properties, in the company’s service area.

Dominion Virginia Power is the state’s largest electric utility, with about 2.3 million
customers.

Fully built, the solar program would generate enough power for 7,500 homes, the company said. Each installation could generate as much as 2 megawatts of electricity during daylight hours.

“When the program was announced last year, it was readily apparent that Old Dominion University was a perfect fit for this innovative project,” ODU President John R. Broderick said in a statement.

Dominion Virginia Power has a lease option with ODU. The company will do a structural analysis to ensure the 150,000-square-foot building is suitable for the solar installation before exercising the option.

The power company will put the solar energy project out for bid, Corsello said. The photovoltaic panels are 3 feet by 5 feet and can generate about 250 watts of electricity each.

The power company is aiming at 20-year leases for its solar installation locations. Dominion Virginia Power did not disclose the cost of the ODU lease, noting that it also will be negotiating other such agreements.

Energy information from the installation will be available at a kiosk inside the Student Recreation Center lobby and in Kaufman Hall, ODU’s engineering school, Dominion Virginia Power said.

Dominion Virginia Power’s parent company, Richmond-based Dominion Resources Inc., is building a solar energy project in Georgia. The Azalea Solar Power Facility, near Augusta, is expected to produce 7.7 megawatts of electricity.

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