

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Facilities & Services

Sustainability and Transportation
Physical Plant Service Building
1501 South Oak Street
Champaign, IL 61820



October 31, 2012

Marika Nell, Chair
Student Sustainability Committee

Dear Marika,

The Board of Trustees (BOT) Subcommittee on Audit, Budget, Finance, and Facilities approved the Solar Farm contract to be on the November 8 agenda for BOT formal approval. In order to keep this project on the agenda, we will need to come to an agreement about each of the points from your letter dated October 28, 2012.

To help guide our discussion, we are providing preliminary responses for each item the Student Sustainability Committee (SSC) listed. The original comments from SSC are shown in *italics* above our preliminary responses.

1. Historic Preservation.

Ideally, the historic timber-frame barn would remain in the same location and be renovated as a center for education or research. If it must be removed it must be preserved, not destroyed.

This point is the most difficult for the Campus to accommodate for three reasons. 1) The state procurement laws prohibit us from modifying the space available to the preferred vendor, unless we cancel this proposal process and start over. 2) To move the barn would require identifying a campus department to “own” the structure, a site selection committee and approval to select a new location, approval from the BOT to modify the Campus Master Plan since this structure is not shown elsewhere on campus, and a funding commitment for the cost to move and rehabilitate the structure. It is important for the SSC to understand the difficulties involved in seeking funding for this type of project, so we intend to explain the status of the Mumford House, Round Barns, and similar structures in our Thursday meeting. 3) It is plausible that we could post a Request For Proposal (RFP) for the highest bidder to buy the structure at the cost of hauling it away; however, the timeline for that would be very tight within the timeline for the Solar Farm contract and the state procurement code is regularly changing and this may no longer be an option. With these hurdles identified, F&S believes that the barn requirement from SSC cannot be accommodated. We respectfully ask that you approve the funding without a requirement about the barn.

2. Educational Component.

As it stands the project does not demonstrate any specific educational components. SSC seeks assurances that real time and historic metering data is readily available to all students. Physical access to the site for classes and interested students is also necessary. Finally, on and offsite signage should be set up to inform students of the project and their rights to access its educational tools.

A) There will be a revenue-grade meter tracking all of the electricity generated by the Solar Farm. The Solar Farm will be tied in directly to the campus grid, and F&S Utilities Distribution has confirmed that there will be a real-time meter with current and historic data available for student and faculty use. B) Regarding the physical access to the site for classes and interested students, we are restricted in the options for the first ten years due to the state procurement process. Once the site and generation equipment belong to the University, we will definitely allow student, faculty, and visitor access for tours, classes, and research projects. We are excited about the possibilities of testing campus developed materials at the Solar Farm in the future. Also, while we cannot promise to be successful, we agree to open discussions about incorporating additional educational components with the preferred vendor during the ten-year contract, after the contract has been fully awarded and executed. At that point, we can initiate new negotiations about additional services that the Solar Farm owner could potentially provide, and the SSC will be invited to participate in those decisions. C) Dr. Dempsey has agreed to post signage, both on and off-site. On the site, the sign will be modeled after the Prairie Zone signs to maintain consistency for sustainability points of interest around campus. Off site, signs that are posters or on electronic screens are probably most effective for communicating to the student body, and we will work with SSC to develop these signs and outreach plan. If you have another location for a physical sign outdoors, please let me know.

3. SSC Portion of Funding.

At the end of 20 years, SSC funding can have been no more than 25% of total subsidy. If the total subsidy provided by SSC exceeds 25%, the difference will be returned to the SSC's general fund. In the event that the SSC no longer exists, the money will return to a similar committee that is governed by students to be used on student-decided energy or sustainability projects.

Yes. This is acceptable.

4. Future Negotiations.

The contract review team must have an SSC representative (in the form of the Chair or his/her designee). This SSC representative will be included in all future decision-making regarding the farm.

In essence, we agree to both of these requests. 1) Regarding the contract review team, we want to be clear that there is nothing left to “negotiate” for the Solar Farm, and that was handled by the Purchasing Division, not F&S. The next steps for the contract are to A) combine the language from the Solar Farm RFP and preferred vendor response with the University’s boiler plate contract language, B) write the Lease and Developer Agreement, and C) write the Power-Purchase Agreement. All of these documents will be shared with F&S for review before being finalized, and Dr. Dempsey has agreed to share it with the SSC chair as well. However, it is extremely important to understand the legal restrictions and state requirements for anyone involved in contract review, so we ask that you do not delegate this review step to the committee. We are restricted from discussing purchasing contracts and legal documents before they are awarded, so we would like to only include the SSC Chairperson in this review step. 2) Any new negotiations, such as the education discussion described above can include an SSC representative, and can be discussed with the committee. For future negotiations and future major decisions about the Solar Farm, we agree to have SSC represented at the table, but we cannot give SSC veto authority over campus facilities.

5. Use of Greenspace.

Future funding for renewable energy projects will give priority to projects that will not use green space, but instead will take advantage of brownfields, parking lots, structures or other existing built spaces.

We agree to focus additional solar energy projects in the built-up areas of campus, to help meet our Climate Action Plan (iCAP) goals for renewable energy without reducing impervious space. We do not yet know how much production capacity is available on the built-up areas of campus, but we will accept a funding denial from SSC if we request support of a renewable energy project that does not reflect the land use priorities SSC sets. We understand this to mean that SSC will not support an expansion of the Solar Farm to the south, in future years. Is that correct? Would SSC still support geothermal energy projects that use greenspace areas for geothermal wells?

6. Future Collaboration.

Future collaboration between stakeholders for large projects (projects that request over \$500,000) will exist throughout the full process of the project. Our executive members should be contacted early in the process to determine what forum will serve as a collaboration space.

This is fine with F&S, but we will need to discuss it further and work through the collaboration process together. The Solar Farm was a project that had student and faculty involvement from the beginning. Dr. Phil Krein was one of our first faculty contacts in October 2011; we shared it with campus at the Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012 iCAP Forums; we shared the RFP document, as well as maps, a fact sheet and a letter with the community and with SSC at the end of February; and, we met with SSC reps at the beginning and end of this summer to discuss the project. We are highly interested in collaborating with students, faculty, and SSC, so clarity about why the collaboration process used for this project was inadequate will be helpful.

Thank you for your continued support as we move toward a more sustainable campus for our students, employees, and visitors. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 217-344-0044 or via email at mbjohnst@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Morgan B. Johnston

Morgan B. Johnston
Sustainability and Transportation Demand Management Coordinator