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## Lakewood schools to study solar energy

### May cut bills by 30%

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Township schools might soon be partially sun-powered if officials agree with a proposal by a nonprofit group that could provide rooftop solar panels at no cost to the district.

The Washington, D.C.-based group, Green Energy Council, gave a presentation Wednesday night to the Board of Education after it was contacted by Board Attorney Michael Inzelbuch, who was charged with searching for a way to bring down the district's utility costs amid a stretched budget.

"I've heard of other districts possibly exploring this idea, which led me to look into this," Inzelbuch said. "This seems to be an option where there could be significant cost reductions in gas and electric while allowing us to become green."

On Wednesday, the Board of Education approved pursuing the idea.

Under the plan, the district would take advantage of a recently passed state bill that extends school board contracts for energy conservation or renewable energy production from five to 15 years. The extension allows sufficient time for private investors to see enough of a return through corporate tax credits, rebates and the selling of Solar Renewal Energy Certificates — akin to commodity stocks for alternative energy users — to make footing the bill for these solar panels lucrative, according to Green Energy Council President Ralph Avallone. At least seven to 10 years are needed for investors to see a profit, Avallone said.

Another investor incentive is a New Jersey mandate that requires at least 20 percent of utility companies' power supply to come from renewal or alternative energy by 2020, forcing them to buy power from sources such as solar panels.

Avallone would introduce the district to these investors interested in "power purchasing agreements."

Since the bill's June passage by the state Legislature, the council has reached out to several districts with the idea. It is working with the Greater Egg Harbor Board of Education to put solar panel systems on two high schools. It also invited Jackson township representatives to the Wednesday meeting in Lakewood. But so far, no agreements have been signed.

"Lakewood would be proverbially busting the cellophane on this," Avallone said.

Inzelbuch cautioned that no commitment has been made, saying "If it saves the board money and allows for flexibility, we will move forward in this direction."

According to Avallone, solar panels on school rooftops can cost between \$1 million and \$5 million depending on roof size and how much energy the building requires. They can also save a district about 30 percent a year on electricity costs, he said.

Avallone recently worked with schools in Ocean Gate and Beachwood on their switch to wind power.