

MEMORANDUM

To: Yakima City Council
From: Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler
Subject: Potential Spark Northwest Partnership
Date: Monday, October 29th, 2018

Council members,

At the Council's October 2nd, 2018 regular meeting, the Council unanimously directed City staff to research the potential of the City partnering with Spark Northwest, a non-profit organization that supports local efforts to simplify the process for residents of Washington State and Oregon communities to invest in solar energy. The Council directed City staff to report on the progress of the research at the Council's November 6th regular meeting.

Founded in 2001, Spark Northwest, formerly known as Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development, works with a local project manager, typically from a local organization, utility, or governmental entity, to provide training, technical assistance, and workshop presentations to facilitate a group purchase program called *Solarize Northwest*. Through the *Solarize Northwest* program, local residents are able to join forces to collectively select a solar contractor and, through a group purchase, significantly reduce the high upfront cost of installing residential solar systems.

Included in the November 6th Council regular meeting packet is a proposal from Spark Northwest to work with the City on a project that would be entitled *Solarize Yakima*. Also included in the November 6th meeting packet is a document entitled *Solarize U*, which provides tools and guidance to help Washington Communities launch solar group purchase programs. Information about 42 homes and one business converting to solar energy in the City of Mercer Island through the *Solarize Northwest* program is also included in the November 6th meeting packet.

As described in the proposal from Spark Northwest, the City's role in the *Solarize Yakima* campaign would primarily consist of serving as the "face" of the campaign by helping to recruit volunteers to serve on a campaign committee and by promoting the campaign through the City's various communications platforms. The City may also be asked to provide meeting space for campaign workshops.

Under the proposal, the City would incur little if any out-of-pocket expenses. However, a moderate amount of City staff time will likely need to be invested in order to coordinate committee recruitment, campaign promotion, and the reservation of meeting space.

The cost of a *Solarize Yakima* campaign is estimated to be about \$25,000 to \$30,000, all of which would be paid for by a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy and distributed by the Washington State Department of Commerce. Spark Northwest staff would serve in the role of campaign manager. Yakima Valley Conference of Governments ("YVCOG") would serve as local campaign lead. Spark Northwest is currently contracting with YVCOG to serve as local campaign lead for a *Solarize Northwest* involving the cities of Sunnyside, Mabton, and Grandview. As local campaign lead, YVCOG coordinates committee meetings, schedules and conducts workshops, and serves as the primary local contact for the campaign.

Solarize Northwest projects typically last about nine months. A project begins with the recruitment and training of committee volunteers. A solar installer is then selected by the committee. Workshops are conducted to educate community members about the process of solar conversion. Installations then occur during a period of time with a specific end date.

Please let me know if you have questions or need additional information about this issue prior to the Council's November 6th regular meeting.