

Stockton Record

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TRACY - President Barack Obama has signed into law a bipartisan bill clearing the way for a 200-acre solar energy project on land west of Tracy.

The law removes a bureaucratic hurdle preventing a solar project along Schulte Road, according to announcements from two regional congressmen who co-sponsored the House version of the Senate bill that crossed Obama's desk Tuesday night.

The coming of the solar array could end years of uncertainty about what was to be done with the land long known as the Antenna Farm.

The renewable-energy project is anticipated to create 200 jobs, according to Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, who introduced the House bill and has been working with Tracy since the outset to clear the way for the project, according to his office.

This type of job-creating project is key to the region's economic recovery, according to Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, who co-sponsored the House bill and chairs the subcommittee that oversees the federal agency that manages government properties.

The bill passed the committee on a unanimous vote, Denham said.

McNerney represents Tracy, and Denham wants to represent the south county city. Both are running for re-election this year, but this is the first election since congressional district boundaries were redrawn last year, so the two incumbents are running in separate districts and are not in competition with each other.

Tracy Mayor Brent Ives praised both and lauded the economic benefit of the projects in statements from the congressional offices.

The city already bought 50 acres of the proposed site. The new law calls for the city to pay market price for the rest of the land, which has figured in one big idea or another for Tracy for more than a decade.

Because of concerns about high-pressure gas lines running beneath the property, the Tracy City Council in 2007 scrapped plans to build a large sports complex for the city's growing population of young people. But not before the city had poured about \$4 million into the project, according to news reports.

A lease agreement with GWF Power Systems, the energy company that plans to build the solar array, would provide a return on the city's investment, Tracy City Manager Leon Churchill said.

Congress first passed legislation in 1998 allowing Tracy to obtain the land from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, but only if 150 of the 200 acres were used for educational purposes, according to the report. Later changes added recreational purposes.

In 2006, Tracy paid about \$1 million for the land through legislation from former Rep. Richard Pombo, a Tracy Republican, that allowed the city to buy 50 acres for economic development and get the 150 acres for recreation or education thrown into the deal, according to news accounts.

The new law begins a new chapter for the land on Schulte Road, Churchill said. "It has been a dormant piece of land, and its really our job as a city to do something productive with it."