

JOHN GARDNER Citizen Telegram Staff Rifle, Colorado

By the end of the year, the Garfield County Airport will be the site of a new community solar farm array.

The Garfield Board of County Commissioners agreed in early September to lease a section of property to Carbondale-based Clean Energy Collective, LLC, who will oversee construction and management of the project.

The CEC plans to build an approximate 1.2 megawatt solar farm in three phases. The first phase will include about 1,300 solar panels, or approximately 300 kilowatt (kW) of power producing capability. The second phase will be approximately double the first phase, about 2,600 panels, or 600 kilowatts. However, it's uncertain of exactly how large the third phase will be at this time, according to CEC founder Paul Spencer.

Construction is scheduled to begin sometime in October and is scheduled for completion by Dec. 31, 2012. Spencer expects the first phase to be completed by the end of the year. It's a project that has Spencer very excited.

“We are definitely chomping at the bit,” Spencer said.

The company leased close to half an acre at the Mid Valley metropolitan district's wastewater treatment plant along Highway 82 near Blue Lake in April. The site was for the company's first solar farm in the area. The 78-kilowatt El Jebel solar array consists of 340 solar panels and 13 investors who are Holy Cross Energy consumers from around the valley. The cost of that project was reported at around \$500,000.

The first two phases of the airport project will cost an estimated \$5.4 million, Spencer said.

The solar panels will then be sold to Holy Cross energy customers who will be credited for the energy produced on their monthly energy bill, Spencer said.

The solar farms are a new model using renewable energy options for residential and commercial property owners who may not be able to afford installation of solar power systems on their property, or other reasons like location. According to a lease and

operating agreement, CEC is under contract to sell renewable energy produced at multiple locations to Holy Cross Energy.

And apparently there is high demand for this type of energy option, Spencer said. The solar array in El Jebel sold out before the array was completed.

And with interest high in the airport array already, Spencer expects a similar outcome.

“We've got people waiting for the Garfield County Airport array,” he said.

The solar panels installed by the CEC at the airport will be owned by customers of Holy Cross, many of whom are residents of Garfield County. CEC has committed to reserve 55 percent of the solar facility for Garfield County residents for the first six months of the agreement.

The first two phases will be enough for between 400 and 500 individual Holy Cross customers to own panels, Spencer said.

The first two phases will also increase Holy Cross Energy's solar producing capacity by 60 percent, according to Spencer.

“It's an excellent start,” he said in making a transition to renewable energy sources and getting away from traditional fossil fuels.

“This definitely could not happen without the county seeing the value of clean energy in our area,” Spencer said.