

## **Generation Solar at the Depot**

The Depot Coffeehouse is a small piece of real estate with a huge profile. The program and the building serve as a nexus for youth and adults, business and service, creativity and history, recreation and education. The oversight of the operations is provided by a panel of community partners representing the City of Hopkins, Three Rivers Park District, Hopkins Area School District, Park Nicollet Foundation, and Depot Express (business entity housed at the Depot). What happens at the Depot reverberates throughout the area. The Depot will soon have a front row seat for the development that will occur around Hopkins as commuter rail makes a return to the community! These are some of the reasons the Depot site is perfect for a high visibility solar demonstration/education projection.

The project has been dubbed Generation Solar to reflect the reality of what the Depot Board members and staff hope to accomplish in supplying some portion of the Depot energy cost with solar generated power. On an entirely different level, the Depot, as a youth inspired and youth led project does indeed represent the generation that will be everyday consumers of solar energy. They represent a sustainable future for our world.

The Depot Coffee House has made continual progress (through the efforts of students, staff, and customers) to become more and more environmentally sound. Actions have included utilizing garbage composting services, switching to serve ware that is compostable, transitioning to CFL lights, repurposing building signboard into tables, upgrading large energy-intensive appliances (HVAC, refrigeration), hosting ecology-oriented student events, and establishing a “green” sustainability fund to continue these kinds of projects.

As early as 2005 Depot staff members and community partners were seeking out ways to use the site as a learning lab for alternative energy projects, especially wind and solar energy. This desire has remained strong. The unique relationship the Depot has with the school district makes the classroom link to the Generation Solar project eminently doable. Already, Depot staff work with marketing and business classes to create amazing and effective materials that are used for both business and programming needs. Similar connections could easily be made with science classrooms. The proximity of the Depot to all levels of school would make it a perfect destination for field trips!

[87] Some specific ideas for Interpretation/Education Activities being considered include:

#### Product development:

Students and staff could come up “sunshine in every cup...” or some kind of slogan to indicate that some of the energy needed to run the coffee shop has been generated by solar panels. The Depot Express often runs seasonal specials for food and beverages. This element would be added in. Special “Depot sunglasses” could be marketed to the trail users frequenting the Depot....the possibilities abound!

#### On Site Promotion

The indoor wide screen television has often been used to show a “loop” presentation, even photo montages that reflect the values and activities associated with the Depot. Coffee cup “sleeves” could have a printed notice or a sun logo that would signify the power source. Information can be designed to be added to the trail kiosk that will indicate the Depot as a site for these grants. Since many of the trail users in the metro do so for transportation and to lessen their carbon footprint, this will make the Depot even more desirable as a biking or hiking destination. The music arts calendar can be reflective of this new emphasis as well (see below).

#### Program Ideas

Community Ed site: The Depot would host and staff a weeklong summer “camp” in conjunction with partner agencies that would utilize supervised high school students as teachers/leaders for area children to come and spend a focused week of science and technology learning. Similar one day programs could be offered throughout the year in collaboration with science-oriented businesses or agencies. These could be geared to various ages and ability levels

Field trip destination: The Depot will serve as a “see it action” place for students learning about solar power and alternative energy. There will be handout developed for various levels of learning to explain how the solar panels at the Depot work and what they power and how that affects the programs there. There will be a web site (or place on Depot web site that will track the energy usage/savings this project makes possible. Depending on available technology this

may be reported in live time from a meter at the Depot which will be visible for folks who come to the Depot as well. Trained staff will be available to serve as interpreters for these guests.

Monthly Green topics: The Depot schedule offers a variety of entertainment and education options. One weeknight evening a month (or more) could be dedicated to some kind of sustainability or alternative energy topic with a speaker or film and discussion. The Twin Cities is full of such folks and the depot could serve as a West Metro locale for this. This could be woven into high school curriculum pattern to be especially relevant and fulfill the learning lab potential of this project.

Solstice Celebration: The Depot will host a June day long solar energy fair and invite a variety of business and education groups to set booths or tables. The day will also include music (% of amplification courtesy of the solar panels on the roof of the building!) and perhaps an evening of music typical to the regular Depot live music schedule. This would be a summer counterpoint to the hugely popular Earth Jam concert that occurs during the winter as a fund and “friend raiser” for the Hopkins High School Earth Club.

Environmental Artist’s Residency: This is a summer program designed to occur during the Hopkins Raspberry festival and would include creating and participating a Raspberry Parade entry/performance. The residency will include several work and learning sessions leading up to the event. This could be offered through existing arts and theatre groups connected with The Depot. Other possibilities include creating art using photosensitive paper, sun-themes, sustainability, etc.

There may be fees associated with some of the offerings to offset larger costs.

Rough budget:

\$2,500 to support student/leadership staff component of summer enrichment class

\$4,000 to support summer arts residency

\$2,000 develop media/display for explaining project

\$1,500 staff support for field trips, stipends or fees for monthly programs

*How will the public know about solar energy being used at this site?*

The solar panels themselves will be highly visible on the steeply pitched roof of the Depot at the intersection of Excelsior Blvd and Rte 169. In fact, the elevated highway and proposed light rail line are other great viewing points. Other **visual cues** will be signage – maybe even incorporating a logo – and educational/promotional media. An on-site “meter” that would indicate energy generated will be showcased. Merchandise, designed by students, will also mention the solar project.

**Relational cues** will occur as the project is embraced by the wide array of Depot partners. Local governments, businesses, schools, and recreational groups will become well aware of Generation Solar at the Depot.

**Edible cues** might include food and beverage products developed to highlight the solar energy component at the Depot.

**Audible cues** would be the usual “blurb” that is offered about the Depot during Depot events. The fact that solar energy accounts for a percent of energy usage will be part of routine presentations about the Depot. Specific concerts or artist’s projects designed around sustainability themes will add to this.

**Virtual cues** will abound as the Depot has a considerable and well-maintained web presence. Links will be sought out with appropriate sites. The Depot youth-driven program is already widely discussed on social network sites. The solar project will become part of that conversation. [www.thedepotcoffeehouse.com](http://www.thedepotcoffeehouse.com).

Since not everyone can or does read, there are plans to have a riot of sunflowers along the Depot trail way to beckon visitors and have them ask, “What’s with all the sunflowers?”