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EBMUD debuts its largest solar array

By Sora O'Doherty



Orinda City Manger David Biggs and City Council Member Brandyn Iverson attended a public event marking the completion of the largest solar array ever built by East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) last week. The Orinda photovoltaic solar energy project is a 12-acre solar array that will connect directly to the electricity grid.

The 4.6-megawatt installation will generate 10 million kilowatt-hours of clean, renewable energy annually and save EBMUD ratepayers \$26 million in electricity costs over the next 25 years. Water treatment and pumping are energy intensive, and this project moves EBMUD closer to its goal to be carbon neutral by the end of this decade, according to the District.

Photo provided

Iverson, speaking at the event, noted that Orinda is a proud partner of EBMUD, and praised the project as being well sited and invisible from the road. She was on the Planning Commission at the commencement of the project in 2019, which she described as "terrific sustainable green infrastructure." The project site is located directly across Bear Creek Road from PG&E's Sobrante Substation. According to EBMUD, this reduces potential impacts associated with interconnection to the electrical grid. In addition, to preserve the open space character of the area, EBMUD has incorporated vegetative screening into the project to minimize its visibility from Bear Creek Road and nearby trails.

The project has been constructed by TotalEnergies. Press and officials were offered tours of the arrays, which are built of steel capable of withstanding high winds up to 120 miles per hour. Eric Potts, Vice President of TotalEnergies, described the 12,000 high efficiency modules which were partly installed using artificial intelligence to direct unmanned pile driving. Only four posts were out of alignment, and those by less than one inch.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

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