

Nelson's sunny days expected to lift energy levels

By Tracy Neal

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Nelson could become New Zealand's first "solar city", after the city council agreed to spend half the \$40,000 needed for a study into how to encourage wider use of solar energy systems.

Newly-formed Richmond company Energyshift Ltd has offered \$20,000 towards the joint study, with an early aim of setting up a pilot scheme to install solar water heating systems in 10 Nelson homes, paid for by home owners.

Company director and Nelson entrepreneur Barrie Leay told the Nelson Mail a pilot scheme would also serve to continue development of leading-edge technology.

The ultimate aim was to install solar energy systems in 1000 properties in the first year of operation, Nelson city councillors heard yesterday.

The feasibility study would look into benefits provided through the bulk purchase of solar heating systems, and the potential for accessing greater government subsidies for the scheme.

It would also look at whether the council could provide loans for such units, which cost up to around \$5500, repaid through rates in a way similar to the current Clean Heat Warm Homes Scheme.

In March this year, the city council waived the \$100 consent fee to install a solar water heating system.

Nelson architect Helen Richards, who says she saves up to 90 percent on hot water bills by using a solar heating system in her home, said it was "one of the best things ever".

She supports the city council's plans to encourage use of solar energy, which she described as a good way to cut power bills and an environmentally sensible option. "In my view, solar hot water is one of the most effective ways to reduce your environmental footprint," she said.

Energyshift was registered with the New Zealand Companies Office on July 22 this year. Mr Leay shares the directorship with businessmen Andrew Booth, of Upper Moutere, and Simon Stockdale, of Nelson.

There was concern among some councillors that supporting the study could create a commercial advantage for Energyshift.

Cr Gail Collingwood queried whether any potential partnership should be opened to a wider pool of interested businesses. Cr Denise Henigan said the company's involvement could be seen as "shoring up opportunities for business".

Mr Leay said there was not likely to be any commercial gain in a short space of time.

Cr Ali Boswijk said the type of expertise offered by Energyshift did not exist in-house and the council should take advantage of the offer made to it.

Mayor Kerry Marshall said it was prudent to engage with people who showed an interest in the city's future needs. "We are safe with what we are doing here."

Crs Alison McAlpine and Derek Shaw, plus council staff, will now be part of the joint working group to finalise design of the study, to be reported to the environment committee.



SMALL FOOTPRINT: Nelson architect Helen Richards saves up to 90 percent on her hot water bills