

A green light for solar projects

Homeowners groups should not block rooftop systems.

Daily Breeze Editorial

Energy-related laws enacted in California over the past three decades or so have attempted to induce property owners to invest in clean energy such as solar and wind. Indeed, it makes sense to encourage consumer spending on improvements that reduce pollution, bolster home values and help keep a lid on greenhouse gases.

One of those laws, the 1978 Solar Rights Act, prohibits cities and homeowners associations from putting up impediments to a homeowner's solar installation plans unless they present a danger to the health or safety of nearby residents.

As reported in a recent edition of the Palos Verdes Peninsula News, that law was central to a controversy in Palos Verdes Estates, where the Palos Verdes Homes Association Art Jury denied permits for solar system installations. The jury rejected three such permit requests by solar company owner Bradley Bartz because his clients wanted blue solar panels rather than the jury's preference for black.

The blue solar panels have the advantage of being manufactured in the United States and are less expensive than their darker counterparts.

Ultimately, the city overruled the art jury's opinion and allowed the projects to proceed. That was the right call. It would have made no sense to go against the spirit of the 1978 law, especially during an era when the federal government will be investing heavily in "green" jobs and alternative energy.

The TreeHugger environmental news Web site drew some thoughtful conclusions from the Peninsula solar debate. First, rather than pointing out objections to solar projects, homeowners associations could be negotiating with vendors for lower-cost rates on bulk purchases for their association members. As interest in this technology grows and equipment costs decline, homeowners associations could influence the look and design of these systems in the future.

Second, suppliers of solar systems made in the United States could do more to make their systems more aesthetically pleasing.

So the best outcome would be for domestic solar companies to continue their work to satisfy consumer demands and make their panels blend in as much as possible. That's a good way to address aesthetic concerns. And homeowners groups should be part of the solution by respecting the state's Solar Rights Act.