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Solar panels set to go in at Avenue Garage; parking temporarily affected

The launch of a new environmental initiative to bring solar power to public facilities may place the Village on the cutting edge, but also will mean a weekend of parking changes for regular users of the Avenue Garage and nearby meters along North Boulevard.

A solar array capable of supplying all of the electricity the 535-space garage requires, and perhaps a little extra for the grid, is scheduled to be installed on Sun., Feb. 12 – barring weather that would affect the safe operation of the large, industrial crane needed to lift materials to the roof from the street six stories below.

The Avenue Garage is scheduled to be closed to all parking, bicycle and pedestrian traffic from 5 a.m. to about 9 p.m. Should weather be an issue, the project will be rescheduled for Feb. 19. Any changes to the project schedule will be posted at www.oak-park.us/solar at least a day prior to the original scheduled date.

"We know the project is going to inconvenience some parking customers," said Interim Parking Services Manager Cara Pavlicek. "That's why we chose a Sunday when traffic in and out of the garage is lightest. We hope everyone will understand, given the significance of this project and the shared community vision it represents."

About 475 trips are made in and out of the Avenue Garage on Sundays, officials say, which is about half the number of trips on Mondays through Fridays.

Pavlicek said those permit holders who use the garage for overnight parking likely will be most affected. She said arrangements have been made to use the OPRF High School garage at Lake Street and Scoville Avenue. In addition, some on-street accommodations will be made to try to address their needs.

Letters have been sent to permit holders with specific details on when and where to park during the project.

Construction also will affect North Boulevard from the Friday before the project until the Monday following, as the crane and construction equipment are stored in the metered parking spaces just east of Oak Park Avenue. The crane will be positioned across all entry/exit lanes once work begins.

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Solar Panels/Avenue Garage
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Pedestrian, vehicle and bicycle access will be barred in the alley west of the garage and along North Boulevard the day of the project during construction, as will access to the private parking spaces in the alley on the day of construction. A flagman will be on hand to help residents access their homes and private parking spaces via Euclid Avenue.

Hourly parkers who use the Avenue Garage on Sundays are urged to use the metered spaces on Lake Street and Oak Park Avenue or park in the Lake & Forest Parking Garage, 938 Lake St., on the day of construction. Parking on Sundays is free in these locations.

Pavlicek acknowledged the possibility that the project date may change, given the uncertainty of the weather this time of year and the safety requirements for the crane. She said her fingers were crossed that the Feb. 12 date will stand, but in the meantime, to check www.oak-park.us/solar for any updates.

Impact on parking always tends to be the focus of construction projects in Oak Park, officials say, but the Avenue Garage project is about much more – a view they hope those inconvenienced by the construction will understand and embrace.

"The solar array on the parking garage will generate sufficient electricity not only to power the electrical needs of the garage, but also generate surplus power that can be sold back to the electric grid," said Village Sustainability Manager K.C. Poulos.

"Beyond the project's impact on the Village's bottom line is what it means to Oak Park as an acknowledged leader in environmental initiatives. We hope this will be the first of many such projects in the community to help reduce our carbon footprint and set positive examples for what can be done with a little creativity, ingenuity and focus on living more sustainably."

Anyone with questions or a unique circumstance should contact Parking Services via e-mail to parking@oak-park.us. Questions related to the solar panel project should be sent to sustainability@oak-park.us.

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