



Orlando Sentinel

Eustis to sell land once targeted for solar farm

By Martin E. Comas, Orlando Sentinel

6:38 PM EDT, October 18, 2013

Eustis city commissioners have agreed to sell to an Orange County land investor nearly 200 acres just south of State Road 44 that once was designated to be part of the largest solar farm in Florida.

The city land, which sits near the Eagle Dunes Golf Course in Sorrento, had been used by Eustis as a sprayfield for reclaimed water.

About two years ago, Eustis considered leasing, and eventually selling, the 198 acres to BlueChip Energy of Lake Mary as part of the company's plans to build a giant solar farm on that property and the adjacent 210 acres.

BlueChip, though, failed to close on the sale with Eustis — after submitting a \$50,000 deposit — and filed for bankruptcy earlier this year amid a sea of debt.

City commissioners agreed Thursday night to sell the property to Daryl Carter, president of Maury L. Carter & Associates of Orlando, for \$1.27 million in cash. Commissioner Albert Eckian cast the only dissenting vote. He did not return calls seeking comment.

According to the average of two appraisals commissioned by Eustis, the property is worth \$1.18 million. The Lake County Property Appraiser's Office lists the land's value at \$1.24 million.

Acting City Manager Dianne Kramer said the sale should be completed by the early January. Eustis has not yet determined how it will use the revenue from the land sale.

BlueChip planned to build a 200-megawatt solar farm on the more than 400 acres. The company received zoning approval for the project from Lake County and even installed hundreds of posts as bases for the solar panels.

But BlueChip suffered a setback when its solar panels being manufactured in Lake Mary weren't certified by UL, Underwriters Laboratories, an independent company that tests products for consumer safety. The UL certification was needed for the solar panels to connect to the region's electric grid.

In July, the solar panels and other company property were sold at an auction in Lake Mary to pay off creditors.

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