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## Can AUHSD Afford to Be a Leader in Green Technology?

*By Diana Stephens*

The Acalanes Unified High School District's Governing Board was informed of changes that may impact its decision to install solar panels at Acalanes, Campolindo, and Miramonte high schools. Neal Skiver, an energy and power financial advisor for Bank of America, reviewed the original lease agreement option and explained that it was no longer feasible due to market confusion as tax benefits have proven smaller than expected. He proposed a second option using Build America Bonds, which allows tax-exempt entities to save on borrowing costs. The bottom line is an increased cost of nearly \$1 million to the school district.

Option Two was presented in general terms, but included the benefit of the District owning the equipment at the end of the 16-year financing term. When the conversation turned to manufacturer's warranty protections, and the installation contractor's maintenance agreements, the Board expressed its discomfort with the changes and lack of specific information.

Underlying much of the presentation was a sense of urgency. Tax benefits are expected to change after the first of the year, and it is anticipated that they will be less beneficial.

Tom Mulvaney was the first board member to express his skepticism. While he voted to move forward on the project last spring, he said, "I feel uncomfortable obligating the community to 2026." He asked for a presentation that details the bidding, financing, and possible construction changes.

Kathy Coppersmith was relieved to hear fellow board members state their concerns, as she has been uncomfortable with certain issues all along. She pointed out that at Acalanes High School, the solar panels were to be installed on platforms in the parking lots, which she felt could impact the already overcrowded situation and lead to more fender benders as students negotiate around the structures. The negative visual impact and the community's reaction to the structures were additional concerns.

In general, the Governing Board was supportive of the idea of renewable energy, protecting the District from rising energy costs and the impact of potential peak day pricing. The consensus was, however, that there was too much information to process and more due diligence is needed. Board President Vanessa Crews asked for the community to be given an opportunity to give its feedback and an independent consultant to provide additional expertise. The consultants asked for and were granted another opportunity to present their plan. Richard Whitmore concluded the discussion by saying, "We let time structure pressures influence us the first time, we need more time for subcommittees to study these issues thoroughly."

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