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George R. Brown Convention Center Receives \$850,000 Grant To Install Solar Panels on Rooftop Houston Endowment awards funding in public-private partnership



HOUSTON – The George R. Brown Convention Center is looking to the sun for part of its energy source as the result of a newly announced public-private partnership.

Houston Endowment Inc., a Houston-based philanthropy, has approved an \$850,000 grant to help install a 100-kilowatt solar energy system on the roof of the downtown convention center. The pilot program calls for solar panels to be installed atop the 11-acre roof of the building in 2009. The balance of funding for the \$1 million project is still being pursued.

The solar system will be one of the largest installations in the region and is the start of a green roof vision and master plan for the convention center. The project has been awarded to the Houston Architecture Foundation in partnership with the City of Houston, BP Solar, CenterPoint, and Amegy.

“We at the Endowment are excited about helping to make our City’s convention center green,” said Larry Faulkner, president of Houston Endowment. “This effort will continue to put Houston at the forefront on energy and climate issues.”

Houston Mayor Bill White hailed the move.

“We continue to show how public-private partnerships can get things done efficiently,” White said. “This is a nice complement to the recent opening of Discovery Green Park, also a public-private partnership with the City.”

Solar Panels

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The city's Convention & Entertainment Facilities Department, which manages the building, also is considering plans to install small gardens on a portion of the roof.

"This is a natural step for us, since we've devoted so much of 2008 toward reducing our carbon footprint," said Luther Villagomez, general manager of the GRB.

The GRB already relies exclusively on alternative energy as its power source. About 20 percent of all energy purchased by the City of Houston comes from green power, and since July all of the convention center's energy has come from that amount through renewable energy credits purchased for the GRB through the city's Energy Management Office. In Texas, virtually all green power comes from wind energy.

The City of Houston has led the way on a number of energy efficiency and green programs including being the largest municipality in the nation to procure renewable power for city facilities. Houston has also been selected as a Department of Energy 2008 Solar America City in recognition of its efforts to embrace renewable power.

The Houston Architecture Foundation will administer the solar power grant to the George R. Brown.

"We are excited to be a part of bringing a beautiful green roof to the George R Brown," said Barry Scardino, executive director of the Houston Architecture Foundation.

A steering committee including the private partners and the City of Houston will be responsible for executing the project. The Houston Advanced Research Center will be the operational project manager for the implementation. HARC will also analyze the energy generation characteristics of the system and provide a report on the impact and economics of solar here in Houston.

The convention center already uses compostable food and beverage containers that turn back into soil within 90 days, conserves energy and water, recycles and donates reusable goods. Recently, the GRB replaced its cooling towers with high-efficiency towers that reduce energy and water use by up to 40 percent.

"Reducing our environmental impact carries great meaning to our clients, too," said Arthur Zehnder, director of sales for the GRB. "Our green commitment is generating interest from several groups interested in booking their events at the George R. Brown."

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The George R. Brown ranks among the 10 largest convention centers in America with nearly 1.2 million square feet of exhibition, meeting and registration space. It is connected to the 1,200-room Hilton Americas-Houston hotel with a doubledeck pedestrian sky bridge and is directly across the street from the new 12-acre Discovery Green Park. In 2007, the George R. Brown marked its 20th year of operations. For more information, please call 800/427-4697 or visit www.houstonconventionctr.com.

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