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with the counter. A man was arrested later that evening. "The tips are still coming in," said police Const. Jason Doucette on Thursday. "This is a great example of teamwork between the VPD, our media partners and the public."

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New Westminster has decided to build Metro Vancouver's first community municipal solar array — dubbed its Urban Solar Garden. — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILES

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New Westminster aims to 'grow' its own power

SOLAR GARDEN: City putting 153 panels on civic building

KEVIN GRIFFIN

New Westminster is poised to become what it describes as the first local government in Metro Vancouver to start "growing" its own solar energy.

The Royal City plans to lead the pack with the Urban Solar Garden: 153 solar panels on the rooftop of a civic building in New Westminster. The two shortlisted sites for the garden are the Queensborough Community Centre and the Public Works Yard building.

Norm Connolly, community energy manager for New Westminster, described the project as the first municipal community solar array in the region. New Westminster is asking for bids and hopes the project can be up and running by this summer.

He hopes it influences other cities and municipalities.

"We called it the Urban Solar Garden because it is in an urban context," he said.

"We're hoping that this will be influential and helpful to other local governments, but also for private-sector players that want to look at conversion and doing something like this on their flat-top roof space."

Connolly said a model for New Westminster has been the community solar garden in Nelson. Built just outside the city, the Nelson Hydro solar array is a centralized facility of solar panels where each community investor receives a proportional credit on their electric bill.

When the Nelson Hydro solar garden opened in June, it was the first in Canada.

New Westminster's Urban Solar Garden solar array will be able to generate up to 50 kilowatts an hour, or 54,000 kW per year.

B.C. Hydro has about 1,300 projects that generate electricity for the users and sell anything extra to the province's grid. Solar accounts for about 90 per cent of the projects in what B.C. Hydro calls Net Metering.

Connolly said the New Westminster project is an example of the growing number of small, local energy producers contributing into the larger energy grid.

"There is a transition point happening — the operating cost of solar production is at a price point where it's starting to become very competitive or quite competitive in some jurisdictions with grid-based electrical energy," Connolly said.

All 153 solar panels in New Westminster were spoken for with \$500 deposits within a 30-day period last year. Connolly said he hopes the final cost per panel is under \$840.

The final price tag of the project may be about \$140,000. That doesn't include costs such as paying for the use of the rooftop site, maintenance and monitoring.

Each panel, he estimated, would generate about \$32 to \$36 a year in savings. Based on a 25-year agreement, the panels could start paying for themselves by year 15 to 19, depending on energy costs.

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Insurance.

