

## COMING SOON: MORE PARKING, SOLAR, AND COMMUNITY SPACE

by Jeff Gold

This summer BriarPatch will be breaking ground to expand its parking and to install a photovoltaic (PV) solar generating system. By October the parking lot will have 45 more parking spaces and greatly improved circulation flow to ease congestion and make it easier to get to the market.



A key feature of the project is an overhead steel structure with 680 solar panels that will generate enough electrical energy to offset 55 percent of the electricity from PG&E that the Patch uses. These panels will provide shade for 48

parking spaces, and cover for a new walkway, apart from the traffic, which will provide a safer walk to the front doors. The remainder of the hillside site will be preserved as “open space,” with new landscaping, activity areas, and the lovely mature pine trees that are already there.

The Co-op Board and Management team have been planning this project over the last year, and the Co-op's recent purchase of the property enables us to make these significant capital improvements with the assurance that they will benefit both current and future generations of BriarPatch shoppers. This project is a giant step forward in the Co-op's long-term commitment to serving the community and fulfilling its mandate to encourage sustainable energy and care for the environment.

## **The Landscape**

Hopefully you have had a chance to look at the site plan rendering that has been on display at the store since March. Landscape architect Jo McProud has worked with me to design this project. Although a few of the pine trees will need to be removed for the parking area, the majority of the large landmark pines and cedars will be untouched and their root zones protected to ensure their healthy survival. Next to one of the largest pines on the hillside, a timber-frame shade structure and picnic area will be constructed. Extra efforts are also being made to retain the healthy conifers along Litton Drive.

## **Traffic Flow**

Over the last few years the Co-op has surveyed shoppers and studied the various options for improving the market. The desire for more parking and better vehicle access has clearly been our number one need. As we all know, finding a parking spot at peak times is often a challenge. The new site design will greatly improve the situation with the addition of so many parking spaces, not to mention two-way circulation that eliminates the current dead-end driveway. To ease the congestion at the Sierra College Drive entrance, the secondary access from Litton Drive will be given new signage to encourage its use as a route in and out of the parking lot.

## **The Solar System**

The use of energy-efficient, environmentally-sensitive design has been a part of BriarPatch's Sierra College Drive store since its construction in 2006, when the Co-op stepped up and built a LEED®-certified 'green' building. Food markets, though, invariably consume a large amount of energy because of the continuous operation of refrigeration systems. The new parking lot therefore presented a perfect opportunity to construct a large overhead structure for solar panels, which will dramatically reduce our utility costs and carbon footprint. The 16,000 square-foot array will span almost the entire 300-foot length of the westerly parking lot, and will have a 5-degree tilt for ideal southern exposure.

BriarPatch is teaming up with California Solar Electric Company in Grass Valley to install the array, which will use the most efficient and productive solar panel unit available.

There will be electric car-charging stations underneath the array. A 30 percent federal credit will defray the overall initial cost. The system will reduce the Co-op's annual electrical bill by \$75,000, saving us \$3 million over the guaranteed 25-year life of the panels. This solar system will be the largest photovoltaic array in our local area, and the first commercial solar project constructed over a parking lot in Nevada County.

There's a real possibility that in the future BriarPatch could add more solar panels, on the building roof and/or over other portions of the parking area, to generate all of its electricity from its own sustainable system.

### **Community Social Hub**



**CALIFORNIA SOLAR**  
**ELECTRIC COMPANY**

BriarPatch has always been much more than just a food store. It has also strengthened our community and our friendships by functioning as a social hub. This upcoming project will further enhance the possibilities of our store as a gathering place by including a new amphitheater area on the landscaped hillside. The amphitheater will initially be graded with berms on three sides, and will be provided with lighting, water, and electrical services. It will be connected to both the market and parking area with graveled pathways. Over time, the amphitheater can be further developed with terracing and other amenities so that it can host meetings, lectures, small concerts, and outdoor dining events. It's also anticipated that the popular patio in front of the market will extend to our new pedestrian walkway, linking the parking area to the building.

It has been a privilege to be a part of the design team for this project, especially as so many Co-op shoppers have expressed their excitement about these changes. The design of this project evokes fond memories of early sketches for the Co-op in 2004, when BriarPatch's leadership so bravely envisioned a future expanded market with 90 parking spaces — roughly half of what we will have when this project is complete!

This month we're on the cusp of Earth Day — a global holiday celebrated by a billion people who want to express their care for the environment. It feels fitting for the Co-op to be breaking new ground now for a sustainable energy system, clearly demonstrating its leadership role in our community. Let us all celebrate every day as Earth Day.

*Jeff Gold was the architect for the building at 290 Sierra College Drive. He has served on the BriarPatch Board and is an ongoing consultant.*

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