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## New lighting helping Walnut Creek save money

By Elisabeth Nardi  
Contra Costa Times  
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On Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek, the old energy-sucking streetlight bulbs have been replaced by energy-efficient LEDs in 126 city streetlight fixtures.

Gone is the orange glow; here to stay is a brighter bluish hue.

The environmentally friendly project didn't replace all of the lights on Ygnacio Valley, just those on the nearly two-mile stretch between Oakland Boulevard and Marchbanks Drive. After a \$17,950 rebate from PG&E, the city paid \$87,000 for the new lights.

Walnut Creek traffic engineer Rafat Raie said this is a pilot project for Walnut Creek to judge how the technology works.

While Walnut Creek paid for the lights, PG&E played a role, too, hiring a contractor to do the work, offering the city a rebate and adjusting the billing rates in what PG&E calls a "turnkey project."

Savings have been dramatic. Walnut Creek's monthly bill for that stretch of street lighting went from \$14,080 a month to \$7,230, Raie said. And energy use went from 12,000 kilowatt hours to 5,700 kwh.

"I think the (financial) savings are great," Raie said, "but I am more excited about the energy savings because, in the long run, when you add up all the city lights and the county lights and the country's lights, you could have a huge cut in energy consumption."

A major unintended benefit from the project: Because the LEDs emit a brighter light, night visibility on the road and sidewalks has improved, Raie said.

"That

translates into better safety and less glare," he said.

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LED lights get dimmer over time but never go out, so Walnut Creek is counting on 10 years of bright lights before the fixtures will be changed, he said.

PG&E spokeswoman Tamar Sarkissian said LED lights improve energy efficiency, are mercury-free and distribute light better, so it's something the company is actively supporting.

"Walnut Creek is switching to a lower billing rate, saving 50 percent on their energy costs, and thanks to stimulus dollars, we're offering the city a \$17,950 rebate," Sarkissian said. "We hope Walnut Creek's decision will inspire other towns and cities to move forward with similar projects."

Walnut Creek is not the only city moving toward energy efficient lights. Danville recently completed an even bigger project, changing 262 of its streetlights to LEDs on Sycamore Valley Road.

While PG&E has worked with cities and towns on other small-scale LED projects, Walnut Creek and Danville are the first large-scale projects in Northern California, Sarkissian said.

It isn't known when or if the rest of the lights on Ygnacio Valley Road will be switched to LED. There are a number of projects on the city's lengthy Capital Investment Program list, which calls for LEDs to replace old energy-inefficient bulbs throughout the city. But no funding, or even the 10-year capital project list itself, has been approved.

Contact Elisabeth Nardi at 925-952-2617.

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