

Sungevity decides to stay in Oakland

Jack London Square lease enables solar firm to double office space

By George Avalos

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In a major boost for Oakland and its quest to capture cutting-edge companies, solar power company Sungevity said Thursday it will stay in the city with lease deals that enable the company to more than double its space and accommodate the hundreds of workers it is hiring, city officials and executives said Thursday.

"We are bursting at the seams," said Danny Kennedy, Sungevity's founder and president. "We have been looking to find a permanent home."

City leaders cheered the news.

"The emerging clean and green technology industries are a priority focus for the city of Oakland," Mayor Jean Quan said. "We're honored to have growing companies such as Sungevity choosing us as a base."

In July, Sungevity said it planned to hire 200 to 300 employees by year's end. That would at least double the company's current workforce of 200.

The deal ends speculation

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about where Sungevity would move its headquarters.

Sungevity's decision to stay put comes at a time when Oakland has encountered mixed success in hanging on to businesses and government agencies.

Over the past 18 months, Oakland has been jolted with word that Clorox has decided to shift hundreds of workers to Pleasanton, as well as plans by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments to move to San Francisco. And Clorox is the target of a takeover bid that could lead to even more job losses.

Still, Oakland has managed to offset these looming job losses with hundreds of new jobs from new-industry companies such as Sungevity.

Pandora Media, BrightSource Energy, Sungevity, iParadigms, First Solar, Lucid Design Group and Livescribe are among the cutting-edge companies that have large operations in Oakland, all of which have headquarters in the city except for First Solar. Most have significantly expanded their operations in the city in the past year or so.

Privately held Sungevity agreed to rent 68,000 square feet in Jack London Square. At present, the company occupies 30,000 square feet, Sungevity spokesman John Ordonez said. The waterfront project is a joint venture of realty firms Ellis Partners and DivcoWest.

Sungevity will take space in two adjacent office buildings. The company is moving its headquarters to 55 Harrison St., where it

will occupy 36,500 square feet. The solar firm also will expand into 31,500 square feet where it is now located, in the adjacent 66 Franklin St. building. The deal was arranged through realty brokerages Cassidy Turley BT Commercial and Cushman & Wakefield.

Sungevity should be in its permanent offices by year's end. The company signed a five-year lease.

The company's decision to remain in Oakland seems to fit with its green business plan.

Jack London Square offers a number of green-friendly amenities.

The Jack London Square complex provides shuttles to the BART stations and other stops in the core section of downtown Oakland. Ferry services connect the Oakland waterfront to San Francisco. Amtrak has a stop at Jack London Square.

"Some of Sungevity's employees commute on Amtrak from San Jose," said Will Miller, a vice president with Ellis Partners. "It's great that Oakland and Jack London Square has a green-tech company that is pulling people from Silicon Valley to come work here."

Founded in 2007, Sungevity offers solar leasing programs to consumers who pay a monthly fee to cover the installation of rooftop energy systems.

In July, Sungevity began to push into the Northeast for the first time. In May, the company announced a retail partnership with home improvement giant Lowe's.

"They are a success story in the green energy field," Miller said. "This is a fun story of a growing company."

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