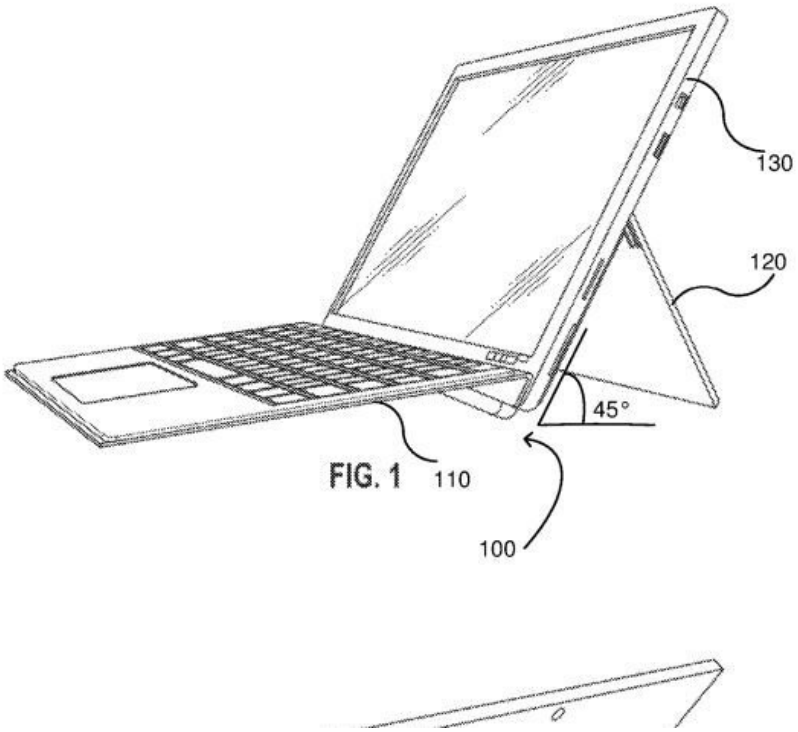
Patent talk: Mobile device with solar panels

January 16 2020, by Nancy Cohen



Are we to expect to see a future Surface Pro with solar panels? Microsoft has thought about a solar power idea as apparent in a patent that the tech giant filed with the USPTO, namely, "Mobile device cover with integrated solar panel." Tech watchers are poised to think this will be seen, if at all seen, in the Surface Pro.

The date of the patent is Jan. 7. The application had been filed on Oct. 2, 2018. Two inventors were named: Ankit Srivastava and Hari Pulapaka. The abstract talks about a cover for a mobile device that includes solar panels and an integrated keyboard.

Spotted by *Windows Latest* in a much quoted article, this patent application created chatter and Surface fans hoped that Microsoft will do something out of the ordinary with this for Surface Pro.

Windows Latest brought up some hopes for Surface Pro this year: "There were various reports claiming Microsoft could introduce a redesigned Surface Pro in 2020 and a patent application suggests that Panos Panay's Surface team is working on another revolutionary device."

The publication won't be placing money bets on solar cover designs any time soon, though. Reports said it was unclear if Microsoft had intentions of launching a Surface Pro or a Type Cover with this idea in 2020.

"Microsoft has filed a patent with USPTO for a solar panel-integrated Surface Pro 8 Type Cover. The patent initially was filed in the second half of 2018 and it was published on a public platform on Tuesday, but it's unclear if the company has started working on this idea for a future iteration of its Surface Pro line," said Mayank Parmar of *Windows Latest*.

The concept: A solar cover and integrated keyboard for juicing up a tablet-like machine. Wccftech spelled out the patent focus: The patent calls for "a Type Cover with embedded solar panels for juicing up the Surface Pro tablet. At least four panels will be fitted on the cover that will also act as a stand and feature an embedded keyboard."

What about if your machine is indoors because it's a dark day and

raining? Or you want to work at evening hours? It would be possible to juice up the device using an artificial light source. Parmar said, "the device could be charged from any artificial sources of light when placed near the panels."

Tyler Lee in Ubergizmo went further into what the patent idea could mean for energy intake:

"The fact that the panels are installed on the kickstand suggests that it could be adjusted to ensure optimal solar energy intake." At what price regarding comfort and viewing angles? Lee said, "this could possibly come at the expense of the viewing angle of the tablet and also comfort levels."

Lee mentioned another limitation with the idea: "some have criticized solar for being relatively slower compared to regular sources of energy, so whether or not it can be used as a main source of power or if it is merely used to extend the overall battery life of the tablet remains to be seen."

But whether you would need to worry about the viewing angle or being slower should not occupy your precious time. Like *Windows Latest*, another site that would not be placing any money bets on this arriving any time soon was *Laptop Mag*, where Phillip Tracy remarked how "Putting solar panels on a mass-production device is among the more audacious ideas we've heard of, so we wouldn't bet on a solar-powered Surface arriving anytime soon."

He said that "Microsoft would need to invest a lot of R&D to make solar a viable solution for increasing the battery life of a tablet or laptop. Along with added cost, solar panels could compromise the device's weight and appearance."

Ewen Spence nonetheless had this to say in Forbes: "I do want to highlight a few reasons why I think this has potential. Interchangeable covers for the Surface Pro are baked into the product...mobile technology places a lot of stock on the available power capacity and the endurance of a device. Adding in a solar technology would extend the endurance...which is always a good thing...I quite like the idea of being able to go 'off grid' with my personal computer."

Laptop Mag: "Microsoft wouldn't be the first to use solar energy to charge a keyboard. Logitech's long-running K750 is a wireless solar keyboard that charges itself when there is light and stays powered for three months in total darkness."

The assignee was Microsoft Technology Licensing. In turn, a thought from *GeekWire*'s Nat Levy. "It will be interesting to see—should this technology ever make it to market—if Microsoft restricts it to Surface Pros, or if it aims bigger and applies solar charging to Surface Duo or even smartphones made by other companies as well."

More information: Patent: www.freepatentsonline.com/10528083.pdf

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