

Helping Solar to Shine

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As subsidies for residential solar energy installations begin to dry up, Huntington is poised to be the first Long Island town to address the high-cost of buying the systems through group purchasing.

A program called Solarize Huntington to be launched later this month will allow residents to pool their buying power through a single solar installer-contractor selected through competitive bidding. The more who sign up for the program the greater the volume discount for systems, which can cost upward of \$40,000, officials said.

The program is administered by the City University of New York's Sustainable CUNY initiative through a Department of Energy grant.

Systems bought through the program can be 15 percent to 25 percent less expensive than those bought by homeowners individually, said Justin Strachan, state solar ombudsman for Sustainable CUNY.

Residential solar adoption in Huntington, as with the rest of Long Island, has soared in recent years. Around 500 new applications are processed a year, said town spokesman A.J. Carter, who said Huntington started the program to "help homeowners" with the high cost of solar.

Similar group purchasing programs are springing up across the county and the state, as municipalities work to expand solar. Solarize programs in Brooklyn, Tompkins County and Troy are in place. Solarize Syracuse doubled solar installations in that upstate city, according to its website.

They come as other federal and state subsidies for solar begin to run out. The LIPA/PSEG Long Island solar rebate, administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, is set to drop to 20 cents a watt, its lowest amount, in coming weeks, said **Joseph Milillo, vice chairman of the Long Island Solar Electric Industry Association**. He said the group has been urging state administrators to keep the rebate at its current 30 cents.

Milillo, who is also the owner of contractor Long Island Power Solutions in Islandia, noted the growing disparity between local electric rates and the solar rebate here.

"We pay the highest amount for electricity but get the lowest rebate," he said. "The disparity is ridiculous."

At the same time, a 30 percent federal tax credit is also set to expire at the end of 2016. "This would be just a massive mistake," said Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington). "We're just breaking through" to large-scale adoption of solar, he said.

Opponents in Congress argue that the government can't afford the credit, but Israel said that if big oil companies continue to receive \$40 billion in subsidies, the solar industry should continue to receive funding as well.

Assemb. Andrew Raia (R-Huntington) argued that state solar rebates for solar also should be continued. "With the price of electricity on Long Island there should be no discussion," he said.