

Follow-up to 2/28 Community Solar Webinar

Thank you to the residents who attended the Community Solar webinar on February 28. That is where you learned about NYS's Community Solar program where electricity account holder can subscribe to a solar project and save up to 10% on their electric bills on an annual basis. The webinar was conducted by PowerMarket, a solar project broker the Town partnered with to subscribe its own electric accounts and to run a community campaign to get the word out to other LaFayette residents.

Here is a link where anyone can view the recorded webinar:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UXGZvPCfx_EpAV9TdTXMgV77_2DdKUhS/view?usp=share_link

I am sorry that my audio was not working at the end of the meeting when questions were being asked and answered. Below are responses I would have liked to share with attendees, as they are based on my own experience subscribing my own and the Town's accounts.

Why is the Town conducting the campaign?

After subscribing its own electric accounts, the Town Board, following a recommendation submitted by the LaFayette Advisory Conservation Commission, decided to inform its residents know about the cost saving opportunity. A campaign plan was approved by the Town, and the campaign was launched on January 1. It ends March 31.

The Town is not insisting, requiring or anything other than recommending the program.

What does the Town get out of the campaign?

After submission of its campaign plan to NYSERDA and after the first 10 households subscribed to a solar project, the Town received 200 points toward another grant from NYSERDA under the *Clean Energy Community* program. The Town does not receive any other benefit for new subscribers above the first 10 (to date, there have been 280 new subscriptions). The only other thing the Town gets out of the campaign are more residents who are reducing their electricity costs.

How does the Town benefit from Clean Energy Community grants?

The Town was recently designated a *Clean Energy Community* after it completed four specific energy-related tasks (none of which cost the Town anything). The Town received a \$5k grant for that designation, and is using that grant to pay for the conversion of its street lights to LEDs, which use 30% less energy than the current lamps (high-pressure sodium). The reduced energy will save the Town \$7,600 per year or \$152k over 20 years on its street light electric bills. A reduction to a Town expense defrays the burden on Town taxpayers. So the bottom line answer is, the Town's taxpayers are the ones who benefit from *Clean Energy Community* grants.

What is meant by up to 10% savings?

Savings are applied to the total electric bill (both supply and delivery charges) and if the solar project operates all year, a subscriber's savings over a 12-month period will average approximately 10%. See the next question about bill credits to understand how savings vary over different months.

The one thing to note about the 10% annual savings is that it assumes the solar project operates the entire 12-month period (Sentinel Heights projects are having startup problems and not currently producing electricity and thus there are no savings yet to the subscribers).

What are bill credits?

Understanding bill credits is what prevented me from subscribing my own account at first. It is confusing. I asked PowerMarket several times to define it more clearly for me. I finally figured it out, so I wrote about it in an [article about the Community Solar program](#) in the Town's July 2022 newsletter.

Eventually I realized the bottom line about bill credits. They are the transaction mechanism between the solar project owner and National Grid, and subscribers don't really need to understand them like I eventually did. To the layperson like myself, it is a wonky way to transact, but I was told there are technical and legal reasons for it.

The only important thing subscribers should understand is that bill credits indicate the amount of savings we earn each monthly bill. Our bill credits and savings will be lower than 10% during winter months and greater than 10% during summer months. That is because solar projects produce less electricity during the winter and more during the summer (due to the different duration and intensity of sunlight that normally occurs during our four seasons).

If I use more electricity to heat during the winter, will my annual savings be less than 10%?

The quick answer is no. The long answer is that your subscription will be based on your last 12 months of bills. So even if your usage is high in the winter and the solar production is low, your credits for each month are based on your annual consumption, not that month's consumption. Over a 12-month period you will receive approximately 10% savings against your annual electricity costs, even though that percentage will vary from month to month. That's because any surplus of credits in the summer months are banked and rolled over into future months.

Although the long answer may be hard to digest, the best answer is that we don't have to figure out what our savings would be, because NYS has lots of data that support the answer. NYS's Community Solar program is not new, it has been in existence for 3 years. There are 100,000s of subscribers in NYS that have shown a 10% savings consistently.

What are the downsides to subscribing to Community Solar?

I looked hard for them during my 5-month research into this program. In the end, I did not find any. There is no cost, it saves me money, there are no fees whatsoever, and I can cancel my subscription

anytime. This sounds too good to be true until I realized who is paying for my savings, it is NYS taxpayers. So I figured I should take advantage of this program to get some of my state taxes back.

If you have any other questions or would like to talk about this program, please contact me at markdistler@gmail.com

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