

Residents hear details about how they can 'Solarize Charlestown'

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CHARLESTOWN — About 75 people crowded into the Cross' Mills Library meeting space Tuesday to learn about Solarize Charlestown, a program offering tiered group discounts on solar panel purchases and installations.

Solarize Charlestown is a part of the Solarize RI, a public-private partnership with support from the state intended to encourage the adoption of residential and commercial solar systems. Partners include the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, SmartPower, a nonprofit marketing firm dedicated to promoting renewable energy, and Commerce RI, the state's economic development organization.

The town chose Sol Power, of Providence, as its solar installation provider through a competitive bid process.

Eric Beecher, president of Sol Power, said his company does nearly all aspects of solar installations beginning with a site visit, followed by evaluating and measuring the home's potential for solar energy, working with National Grid to determine the allowable size of the installation, and designing the solar panels' placement, and installing the panels and accompanying equipment.

The price of the solar panels and installation decrease as more people sign up, he said. In Tier I, requiring one to 10 installations, the price per kilowatt will be 3.14 cents; Tier II, requiring 11 to 30 installations, will be 3.04 cents per kilowatt; and Tier III, anything above 30 installations, will bring the price down to 2.94 cents per kilowatt hour.

Residents have two state incentives for monetizing the excess energy their solar panels produce. They can either sell back the electricity to National Grid at 3.475 cents, a price guaranteed for 15 years, or receive credits on their bills.

"The credits roll forward; you bank kilowatt hours in the summer and use them in the winter," he said.

Beecher said that National Grid determines the maximum size of the solar installation by looking at three years of the home's electricity use and will not allow installations to exceed the average usage amount.

His company offers a 10-year full-service warranty on the installation and the solar panels come with a 25-year manufacturer's warranty. The warranties are transferable when properties are sold, he said.

Even though the solar panels may increase the value of the home, residential solar is exempt from increasing the tax assessment value, Beecher said.

The installations are also eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit, he said.

The sign-up period for the program began on June 7 and ends on Sept. 8.

A second information session is tentatively scheduled for Aug. 5 at 2 p.m. at the Kettle Pond Center. For more information, go the charlestownri.org or solpowersolar.com/charlestown.