

Charlestown is state's shining example for Solarize RI incentive program

September 12, 2017 By Catherine Hewitt Sun staff writer



Solarize Charlestown was launched on June 7 and the program deadline has been extended to October 6. Those participating in the program will pay \$2.94 per watt, a substantial savings compared to an average of \$3.80 to \$4.00 in Rhode Island. (Pictured, left to right: Josh Mason, Sol Power technician; Tamar Wells, a Charlestown resident who signed a solar contract this summer; Nancy Mogielnicki, homeowner; Julie Carroccia, Town Council Vice President; Peter Mogielnicki, homeowner; and Rich Wells, homeowner.)

CHARLESTOWN — With 34 signed contracts to date, Solarize Charlestown has reached Tier III pricing and the sign-up period has been extended another four weeks to Oct. 6.

So far, more than 300 people have requested information about the program, 160 have had in-home assessments and at least 50 more in-home assessments are in line to be scheduled before the deadline, said Karen Stewart, community outreach manager for SmartPower, a non-profit marketing firm specializing in clean, renewable energy.

"We are excited about those numbers, who knows how many contracts will come out of it," she said Tuesday. "Some communities have never reached 300 and Charlestown is probably the smallest community to reach that high a number."

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Launched on June 7, the program offered three pricing tiers with increasing discounts as more people sign up. Tier III required at least 30 solar installations, bringing the price of the solar panels and installation to \$2.94 per watt. Tier II required 11 to 30 installations, priced at \$3.04 per watt; Tier I required one to 10 installations at \$3.14 per watt.

Stewart said the tiers represented a range because the prices are actually based on the solar panels' kilowatts installed, not the number of contracts since the electricity needed in each home varies.

"If the panels can generate 150 kilowatts or more total, you've reached Tier III," she said. "The reason for that is the state has a kilowatt goal; they don't have a number of contracts goal."

Charlestown is the 15th town in the state to participate in Solarize RI, a public-private partnership begun in 2014 with support from the state intended to encourage the installation of residential and commercial solar systems. Partners include the state Office of Energy Resources, SmartPower, and Commerce RI, the official economic development organization for the state.

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

The solar installations begin with a site visit followed by an evaluation of the home's potential for solar energy. Sol Power works with National Grid to determine the allowable size of the installation, which is calculated by looking at three years' worth of electricity usage; installations are not permitted to exceed the home's average usage amount.

Sol Power designs the placement of solar panels and installs them with accompanying equipment. The company offers a 10-year full-service warranty on the installation, and the solar panels come with a 25-year manufacturer's warranty. If the house is sold, the warranties are transferable.

The state offers residents two incentives for monetizing the excess energy produced by their solar panels: either sell back the electricity to National Grid at 34.75 cents per kilowatt-hour, a price guaranteed for 15 years, or receive credits on the home's electric bills.

A range of financing is available and installations are eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit.

The response from residents has exceeded expectations, Town Council Vice President Julie Carroccia on Tuesday. Carroccia is also the sponsor of the program with Ruth Platner, chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

"I thought we would see a good community response because everyone here is very environmentally conscious," Carroccia. "I expected a good response but the response has been even better than I had hoped."

For more information, go to www.charlestownri.org or www.solpowersolar.com/charlestown.
<http://www.thewesterlysun.com/news/charlestown/10861877-154/charlestown-is-states-shining-example-for-solarize-ri-incentive-program.html#gallery-1>