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Panel shines light on solar

Incentives abound, but careful planning is essential

By ADINA GENN

Although financial and energy savings abound, solar panels are still not ubiquitous on Long Island. Yet the interest in solar energy continues to soar.

This is according to industry experts that addressed a group of nearly 80 business leaders at “Why Commercial Solar Right Now,” a panel held at the Heritage Club at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale.

Moderated by Kyle Strober, the executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, the panel aimed to define the benefits and growth of solar energy.

“In the last decade solar has grown exponentially in New York by approximately 4,600 percent,” Strober said.

Still, New York is continuing to lead the charge.

This week the New York State Senate passed “The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act,” which the Sierra Club considers to be the “strongest climate legislation in the nation.”

The legislation includes mandates for New York to source 70 percent of electricity from renewable sources such as solar by 2030. And the Sierra Club also points to the codifying of the state’s clean energy commitments, including 6 gigawatts of distributed solar.

Meanwhile, The Sustainability Institute at Molloy College is working with Nassau and Suffolk counties to adopt Commercial PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing for clean energy projects in commercial buildings throughout the region.

And prices for solar have fallen 47 percent over the last five years, Strober said.

“It’s a great business opportunity – better than ever” with “tangible, immediate savings,” said David Schieren, chief executive officer of EmPower Solar, an Island Park-based solar company.

Right now, when it comes to solar, New York State ranks tenth in the nation. And the state has enough solar installed to



Industry experts talk about incentives for businesses to implement solar energy.

power 280,919 homes – 50,000 of them on Long Island, Strober said.

There are customized products and funding solutions in the business community, including third-party ownerships, that can help companies and homeowners tap into solar.

There are multiple benefits to on-site solar and battery storage systems for owner-operated building and long-term tenants, according to EmPower Solar. Benefits include reducing electric utility bills, lowering utility demand charges, leveraging federal tax credits, and accessing New York State rebates.

For building and landowners and developers, community solar programs would bring in annual rent for roof space. EmPower Solar also has programs in which it pays for a new roof. There are additional opportunities that include hosting a clean power plant, contributing to the regional community, giving tenants the first option for low-cost electric and other benefits.

“It is important to make it easy [for clients] to finance their solar purchase,” said John DeCelle, president and CEO of

Westbury-based Nassau Financial Federal Credit Union. The credit union has already worked with 300 homes on Long Island and is beginning to work now with commercial clients. There are bridge loans that can cover an owner until the term loan comes in, and term loans that help finance a solar system over 15 years.

Preparation is essential.

“Plan ahead,” said Michael Hults, a partner at Cameron Engineering in Woodbury. For example, building owners will want to consider an “energy master plan” and the siting of the building, including its exposure, any shadows and other elements.

Designing a solar system “is an art,” Hults said. Additional considerations include “what you can do beyond, including insulation and HVAC equipment – it’s all part of the energy management plan.”

And there’s no one size fits all, said Bob Burwasser of Carlisle Roof Foam and Coatings.

“Every roof is a separate case,” he said, noting that it’s key to “perform an evaluation on the roof before looking at installing solar.”

Businesses seeking to adopt solar will also want to consult with an attorney and an accountant.

“The options are enormous,” said Michael Faltischek, a member of Ruskin Moscou Faltischek, who advises entrepreneurs. He pointed to opportunities with selling excess power to the grid, community solar, purchasing insurance to cover gaps and more. “Make sure what you’re getting is what you bargained for.”

And there are tax credits that come into play, including the ability to deduct 30 percent of installing a solar system from federal taxes if a substantial amount of work is completed by Dec. 31, said Jeffrey Cohen, the partner-in-charge of tax services at Grassi & Co.

“How you structure a project from a tax perspective is really important,” he said.

And, he pointed out, “there are ways to spread out depreciation.”

Now, with technology advancing, especially when it comes to battery storage, experts anticipate the paradigm shift toward solar to continue.

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