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Green Power Bill Green-Lighted by Hochul

December 24, 2021 Beth Young 0 Comments

It's been a year, almost to the day, since New York State gave its Public Service Commission control over the Long Island Power Authority, paving the way to require LIPA to allow renewable energy companies to sell power to the Long Island grid.

But that bill did not address LIPA's fee structure, which South Fork State Assemblyman Fred Thiele called a "poison pill" to the effort to green the local energy grid.

On Dec. 22, 2021, New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed new legislation that will allow local communities to set up Community Choice Aggregation programs, which allows outside Energy Service Companies, known as ESCOs, many of which specialize in renewable energy, to sell power directly in to the Long Island grid.

Historically, LIPA's fee structure had been set up so that rate payers would have to pay an extra five cent-per-kilowatt/hour surcharge for energy generated by ESCOs, which can now be changed under this new legislation.

Mr. Thiele, along with State Senator Todd Kaminsky of Long Beach, sponsored the new legislation.

"In 2016, the Public Service Commission authorized CCA programs statewide," said Mr. Thiele in a statement after the governor signed the legislation. "However, the initial order failed to consider the complexities of LIPA's service territory and rate structure, barring Long Islanders from accessing the

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Southampton Town has been at the forefront of this effort, and was the first town on Long Island to adopt legislation to create a local CCA program.

Sustainable Southampton Green Advisory Committee member Lynn Arthur has been leading the CCA effort on the part of the town for the past four years.

"We are so excited about this," said Ms. Arthur on Dec. 23. "We're one step closer. We started this effort with Fred (Thiele) almost 10 months ago. Over the weekend, we ran a two-day public outreach campaign and got a little less than 450 letters sent to the governor asking her to sign the bill."

"Whatever rules the Public Service Commission sets up for CCA in New York State, this bill will require LIPA to follow," she added. "That is a big deal and the governor is supporting Long Islanders … wow!"

Statewide, more than 60 municipalities already participate in CCA programs, of which more than half are powered by 100 percent renewable energy, according to Mr. Thiele's office, and these programs serve as a vital tool as the state pursues its ambitious climate goals.

CCA programs allow local communities and their residents to pool resources when purchasing energy, thereby expanding access to significantly enhanced alternative options and autonomy over their sources of energy and energy mix.

"Long Island plays an undeniable role in New York State's energy and climate future," said Mr. Thiele. "With this bill now officially signed into law, our towns can finally join the rest of the state in pursuing greener and cheaper energy alternatives. I'm grateful for my partnership with Senator Kaminsky and the governor signing this measure into law."

Southampton is calling its program Choice Community Power, and organizers are hoping that other local municipalities will join the program, giving Choice Community Power more leverage in obtaining bulk pricing when it begins to buy electricity. More information is online at choicecommunitypower.com.

Southampton Village, and East Hampton and Brookhaven towns have all passed legislation supporting the CCA concept.

Southampton's program is modeled after the Community Choice Aggregation Energy Program implemented in Westchester County in 2016, which now includes 26 municipalities. Organizers of that program estimated in 2019 that more that 125,000 ratepayers there had saved more than $13 million in total on their electric bills.

Choice Community Power is being administered for Southampton Town by Joule Community Power, which set up the Westchester program in 2016.

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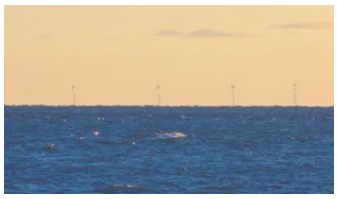

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Beth Young has been covering the East End since the 1990s. In her spare time, she runs around the block, tinkers with bicycles, tries not to drown in the Peconic Bay and hopes to grow the perfect tomato. You can send her a message at editor@eastendbeacon.com

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