

Solar Project At Landfill Could Mean An Array Of Benefits

By

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It's an experiment that, if successful, would see the first solar array of its kind on Long Island with multifaceted windfalls — to the Town of Southampton and to some of its residents.

Earlier this month, the Town Board voted unanimously to give the Boston-based Kearsarge Energy Limited Partnership the contract to build and operate a community solar installation of approximately 4.5 megawatts at the North Sea Landfill.

Southampton will ink a 20-year lease with the company, and as a municipally led community choice aggregation (CCA)/community distributed generation (CDG) community solar project, the town will receive an annual lease payment of \$60,000 with a 2 percent annual escalator from the developer, a one-time payment to the town estimated at \$25,000 from its CCA administrator and the opportunity to provide a 10 percent monthly energy bill credit to community members who participate in the program.

“There's no expense on the town's part for any of us, that's really the goal,” Councilman John Bouvier, who spearheaded the project, pointed out.

“The Sustainability Committee has been promoting this project for years. Southampton's community solar project is the only solar array on Long Island that will pump millions of dollars back into the town hosting the project,” committee member Lynn Arthur said. Under the Town's Community Choice Aggregation program, in addition to accelerating lease revenue, it will generate free electric bill credits for residents for 20 years, while greening the grid at the same time.”

The energy bill credit equates to one free month of electricity annually for participating community members for the life of the lease — 20 years.

“Many residents in our community have wanted the benefits of solar energy,” stated Bouvier, “but were not able to access those benefits for several reasons — shaded roofs, structural issues, etc. This project brings renewable energy resources into the community with direct benefits to our residents and at no cost to the residents.”

Selection for participation in the pilot program may use eligibility criteria that mirror the STAR program; the Town Board has yet to finalize that discussion. Board members generally agreed, however, that this initial pilot project will focus on making the energy credits available to community members possibly based on age and/or income requirements. Once the precise participation criteria for this program are established, the town will launch an information and enrollment campaign for community members in mid-2022.

Bouvier favors the aspect of the project that makes use of otherwise unusable town-owned land. If the project is successful, he said there are other properties where such a setup could be installed. If similar community solar projects can be launched in the future, energy credits could be available to more and more members of the community.

Kearsarge expects to begin construction of the solar array in November, with an anticipated completion date in November 2022. The community will be able to keep track of the project’s progress on the town’s Community Projects page on the town website once the construction commences next month.