

Ashfield News – Energy Committee
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Need help getting solar for your home or business?

SOLAR POWER

More energy from the sun falls on the earth in one hour than is used by everyone in the world in an entire year (NREL). Solar power plays a crucial role in the decarbonization of homes, businesses and transportation, which is essential if we are to combat climate change. Did you know 173 permits for a solar installation have been taken out in Ashfield since 2011? The Energy Committee would like to help even more Ashfield residents go solar.

Basic information about solar power

Solar cells convert sunlight to direct current (DC) electricity which then must be changed to alternating current (AC). A solar panel consists of solar cells wired to each other. Solar panels are rated by the amount of DC-power they produce under standard conditions. Most solar panels on the market today produce 250- 400 watts of power. A solar array consists of multiple solar panels that are mounted on a roof, a pole or a rack and wired to supply electricity for a particular purpose: residential, commercial or agricultural.

All this information is interesting, but you do not need to be an expert on solar power in order to bring it to your home or business. There are numerous knowledgeable, responsible, and reliable professional installers in the region. After interviewing a few, you will select one to help you configure and install your solar system according to the character of your home or business and to provide information about State and Federal incentives to help you pay for the solar installation.

Ashfield Residents

In 2015 the Green Communities Committee helped launch the Solarize Plainfield-Ashfield-Buckland program which gave homeowners in these towns reduced rates on installing solar by getting a number of people to sign on. The Solarize program vetted contractors and picked Direct Energy Solar, a large company based in Maryland to build 43 systems in town. Alex and Joe Osterman put in a 20 panel, 5.3 kW ground mount system at this time. “We have absolutely loved having solar. It felt really good to be offsetting the power we use with clean energy. It has felt especially good when we got our annual SREC check from the power company and when we saw negative electric “bills.” Because we recently purchased electric cars and air source heat pumps for heating/ cooling we have needed more electricity and just finished a second solar installation of roughly 6kW on our barn roof with a local company, PV2. With this installation we put in 2 large batteries in the basement so that if the grid goes down we will still have power.”

Jonathan and Nicole Williams put solar panels on their barn roof in 2016 creating enough electricity to power their entire property. “It has been a very positive experience...There has been no maintenance. The panels are all monitored by the solar company and by an app on our phones. The app is great because we can track each solar panel and how much energy is being produced...The solar panels were very much worth the investment. We would highly recommend solar panels.”

Marty Benjamin began looking into solar for environmental and financial reasons. He had several local companies come out but found they did not follow through with him. During a trip to Home Depot he was approached by a representative of Sun Run, a large national company. “Much to my surprise, they were very proactive and followed through with great customer service.” Sun Run put approximately 35 panels on his roof in 2019. Marty looked into owning vs leasing and settled on a solar lease, where he did not have to put any money down and in fact the company replaced all the areas of his roof covered by panels. Marty encourages people considering different financing options to sit down and do a total cost analysis over the life of the panels to decide which is the best approach for them, as he thinks he may have saved more money in the long run if he had purchased his panels.

Peter and Barbara Curtis built a passive house in 2017 powered entirely with electricity through a 10kW solar installation. Their focus was to invest more at the outset so as to lower the cost of living going forward and to begin living without oil, propane, car exhaust, which produce “a toxic environment for us and the world at large.” Their pole- mounted solar panels are oriented due south and can be adjusted but do not track to keep the system simple with no moving parts. They preferred to keep the panels off their roof and are pleased to have sized their system large enough to power all their needs: heating/cooling, electric car, electric bicycle, hot tub, electric weed whacker, etc.

First Steps

If you are considering solar, the first step is to look at your electric bills over the last year to see how much power you actually use. Then contact an installer to come out to your property and do a free assessment where they look at potential sites and calculate shading and other factors. They should then be able to give you a recommendation to proceed or not and an estimate based on current incentives showing how long it would take for the system to pay for itself.

Let the Energy Committee know if you need help bringing solar into your home or business.

Contact us at energy@ashfield.org. Check the Energy Committee page on the Ashfield Website for a list of solar contractors.