

#60 Green Light for Solar Electric

Every one knows that solar electric, also called photo voltaic, renewable energy is one of the most adaptable renewable systems. There are very few places or buildings where these panels cannot be installed to capture the sun light that falls everywhere.

They can be mounted on the roof in a variety of patterns, on a fixed pole or with a tracking system that follows the sun on its path every day and even sheds snow. They can be the roof or even the wall of a building.

Solar electric produces electricity coincident with peak demand, increases grid reliability,(the last power black out cost billions - more than the cost of solar electric systems large enough to prevent it). Solar electric can supply the electricity for the pumps, fans, compressors and other devices that enable solar thermal and geo-thermal systems. With no carbon, no emissions, no fuel or fuel price spikes and highest rate of job creation among the renewable energy technologies, solar electric should be leading the way. In neighboring states and such national leaders as California, it is. In New York State, it is not. That is about to change.

The change is going to be radical. It needs to be. New York State has about 15 million watts of solar electric power or .0003871% of electric demand. California has 313 million watts of solar power and proposes to go to 3,000 mw. New Jersey has 44 million watts of solar electric and proposes to go to 1,500mw. National solar manufacturers have been hesitant to locate here. One of the few US manufacturers looking to treble their capacity considered New York State in 2007 but stayed in Massachusetts because of our legislation and utility regulations about solar electricity. Several hundred good paying jobs and the kind of economic multiplier that could spark a new wave of sustainable economic development were at stake.

In a matter of weeks, both the Assembly and the Senate will pass renewable energy bills that will begin to open substantial opportunities for solar electric in New York State. Governor Patterson was directly involved in the formation of the first state comprehensive energy plan. There are new chairs for the energy committees in both houses. The bills call for expanding net metering from 10kw to 2mw and to make schools, libraries, hospitals, churches, businesses, industries eligible for net metering. It is hard to imagine how negative New York State policy on renewable energy has been. Net metering expansion turns this around by allowing solar electric systems to sell energy to the grid at profitable rates when they are producing more than consuming.

There is a lot more to be done. It looks as though the 2008 solar electric incentive is going to run out by mid-summer. With a state budget more than 5 billion in deficit, 3 or 4 fold increases in funding for solar electric (and other renewable energy technologies) is still a good investment. It pays for itself and prevents billions in losses. With significant additional funding through Public Service Commission and Legislative decisions, the renewable energy projects at Sullivan County Community College can move ahead as well as renewable energy projects for farmers, all other businesses, churches, hospitals, municipal buildings and homes.

Every day the sun delivers more energy than we can use for every purpose in a year. Every day we live in conditions that increase the destruction of life support systems. It is our choice to be a people of opportunity, of partners with nature, of responsible parents and guardians of the promise for future generations. Some help appears to be on the way

but individual and community actions are necessary to multiply progress a thousand times over and this will just be the beginning of what is needed.