



Access World News

Virginia Solar United Neighborhoods

The power of the sun - Solar energy group meets at the EACC

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ELKTON – Some bright ideas were discussed at the Elkton Area Community Center last week.

Members of Virginia SUN met with some 20 persons interested in adding solar power to their homes.

The Oct. 22 public informational meeting was hosted by Joy Loving, a Grottoes-area resident who recently added solar to her home.

Virginia Solar United Neighborhoods helps locals across the state set up regional cooperatives for those who want to learn more about residential solar power.

The local group is called Massanutten Regional Solar Cooperative, Loving said.

It includes residents of Page, Rockingham and Shenandoah counties. The co-op is not a legal entity but registering enables one to qualify for group pricing, Loving said.

She said that on average it takes seven to 12 years to recoup the cost of solar. In addition to a group discount, co-op members can use a federal tax credit that represents 30 percent of the cost of installation.

One typically needs to have a south-facing roof to make solar work efficiently and having a roof free from tree shade is essential, she said. Solar systems typically last 25-30 years, so the remaining life of one's roof should also be taken into account.

Solar photovoltaic panels are covered with a hydrophilic coating similar to Rain-X that helps them last longer, said Jeff Nicholson, an installer from Sigora Solar of Waynesboro who attended the meeting.

The ideal slope of a roof for solar is 35 degrees, although flat roofs can be modified by using a tray of concrete blocks.

A solar panel converts sunlight to direct current then an inverter converts it to alternating current. Extra electricity not used by the home can go onto the electric grid, which results in a credit for the homeowner through what's known as "net metering."

An installer for the group will be chosen in mid-November with free individualized site visits to follow. This includes a "no obligation" satellite roof analysis.

Last week's meeting was a followup on Solarize Harrisonburg, which was held last year and resulted in some 68 residences going solar, Loving said.

She said Virginia isn't one of the friendliest states for solar power and that changes to state law are needed.

She notes there is a cap on how many people can have net metering, “but we’re nowhere near it.”

Nicholson said that net metering has been in effect since 2000. The state Legislature enacted a law in 2014 that prohibits homeowners associations from banning solar and allows reasonable restrictions. However the term “reasonable” wasn’t defined so it’s difficult to enforce, he said.

In addition, Nicholson said that solar organizations are looking for the State Corporation Commission to issue implementation language for the state solar laws in the near future. Specifically, this could help determine how big of a system one can install with new construction.

The current law only allows one to install a system based on previous electricity usage, which isn’t possible with new construction. Revisions to the law are also needed for those who want to expand their homes or increase the occupancy, he said. The signup period for Massanutten Regional Solar Cooperative will run into January, Loving said.

For more information, email solarteam@vasun.org or go online at vasun.org.

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