

Southampton Town ratepayers could save millions on energy bills with solar farm deal

By Vera Chinese

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Updated October 17, 2021 5:00 AM

Southampton Town has awarded a Boston company a contract to build a 4.5-megawatt solar farm atop a former landfill under an agreement that could bring millions of dollars in energy discounts to some residents.

The town board voted 5-0 last week on a 20-year contract to Kearsarge Energy Limited Partnership to lease the land atop the capped landfill in North Sea and build the facility there. The company was chosen because of its experience operating similar projects throughout the Northeast, according to a town news release.

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

Work is expected to begin in November and be completed a year later. The company's proposal estimates the project could save Southampton property owners in the program a combined \$2.4 million in electricity costs over the next 20 years.

Under the agreement, Kearsarge will pay the town \$60,000 the first year of its lease, with a 2% increase each year thereafter. But what perhaps is the agreement's greatest benefit is a 10% energy credit that the town can distribute to an estimated 1,100 ratepayers, said Deputy Supervisor Frank Zappone.

"Ten percent on a monthly basis, over a course of a year, is one month of free electricity," he said. "That's not a bad deal."

Town officials have not decided who will be eligible for the benefit, but Zappone said senior citizens and veterans could be a priority.

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The project, known as community distributed generation, is under the regulatory framework of a state program known as Community Choice Aggregation. The program allows municipalities to make wholesale energy purchases through contracts with third-party suppliers.

The town will also receive an estimated one-time, \$25,000 payment from Joule Assets Inc., the town's Community Choice administrator, as part of the contract with Kearsarge. Joule will be responsible for

customer outreach, signup and management.

Lynn Arthur, executive director of Peak Power Long Island, a not-for-profit company that has been advising Southampton on the program, said the town is awaiting a decision from the Public Service Commission that would allow it to greatly expand its Community Choice Aggregation program.

"Community Choice Aggregation is one of, if not the most powerful tools in the State's arsenal to achieve clean energy and climate protection goals," states the town's petition to the PSC.



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