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## Lafayette Joins SunShares Program

By Sophie Braccini



Solar panels on rooftops Photo provided

Lafayette and three other East Bay cities have joined SunShares - a program managed by nonprofit Vote Solar that offers a 15 percent discount on purchased or leased solar equipment. The Orinda and Moraga city councils will decide next month whether they will join the program, but according to SunShares Program Director Jessie Denver, any Lamorinda resident can join. The SunShares program has helped put solar panels on roofs throughout the United States, including about 1,000 in the Peninsula.

Staff from the city of Walnut Creek and Vote Solar spoke to the city of Lafayette's Environmental Task Force, which recommended that Lafayette join the program, said Lafayette assistant planner Megan Canales. "On June 8, the council adopted a resolution authorizing our participation in the program," she said.

By offering pre-negotiated pricing, ease of administration and public outreach, Canales said the task force and council anticipate that more residents will choose to install solar. "The city wants to encourage solar installations in general," she said. Canales said she believes that the increased solar installations will help Lafayette meet state goals set out in Assembly Bill 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act, in addition to the city's environmental strategy goals.

Through SunShares, Vote Solar hopes to increase sales of solar panels before the 30 percent federal tax credit ends in 2016, said Denver. "We are also aware that utility companies have filed proposals to change the net metering structure with lesser compensation for solar customers," she added. "If they are successful, the people who have already installed their panels will be grandfathered in."

One of the objectives is to make choosing solar simpler. "With this program, we simply want people to find out if solar is good for them," explained Denver. "There is no obligation to receive a proposal; people can just see if it is a good fit for their situation."

By working with cities and advocacy groups to advertise the program, she said the installers save on their customer acquisition costs. "They pass the savings to the users with the 15 percent discount," she said, adding that the two companies chosen for the program, Skytech Solar and Sunrun, provide the best equipment and service.

"Most people have never contracted for a solar installation, so it is not surprising that people are wary of trying to do it," commented Lafayette Mayor Brandt Andersson. "Many still recall early efforts 20 to 30 years ago to encourage solar installations through tax credits, when most installers were inexperienced and some were just trying to take advantage of the tax credits. SunShares allows the residents of Lafayette and its partner cities to work with experienced, reputable firms, while taking advantage of bulk purchasing to lower costs. It should give residents confidence that they can use solar as a cost-effective and reliable alternative energy source."

To start the process, interested residents should go to <http://www.mygroupenergy.com/group/eastbaysunshares> and enter their information.

"They will be contacted within five to seven business days," said Denver. The installer will evaluate the financial benefits of a solar installation and make a proposal. If homeowners think the proposal looks economically interesting, they then choose one of several options to finance their

panels.

"People who choose to use SunShares can also take advantage of PACE financing programs that the city has also approved," says Canales. The financing mechanism, which was also approved by Moraga and Orinda, allows property owners to repay for solar panels and equipment through payment assessments or special taxes on their property tax bills over a set period of time. Homeowners can also self-finance or enter a power purchase agreement with the partner installers. Under a lease PPA, the installer owns, operates and maintains the system, and the homeowner pays a pre-determined set rate for their electricity that is less than what they currently pay to their utility.

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