

LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK**Sisters of St. Joseph installs community solar power system**

Project will provide 1 megawatt of power to the 212-acre Brentwood campus.



LIPA's first community solar project is located on five acres of the Sisters of St. Joseph, in Brentwood. Photo Credit: EmPower Solar

By Mark Harrington

mark.harrington@newsday.com  @MHarringtonNews

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Long Island's first "community" solar installation that allows a group of ratepayers to collectively share in the cost-benefits of a large solar array is officially operating in Brentwood.

The new system, the result of a LIPA-approved rule change in 2016, will provide 1 megawatt of power to hundreds of residents and offices of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a 212-acre campus in Brentwood that is home to the Catholic order of religious women.

The project is owned by NextEra Energy Sources and operates under contract to the Sisters. Construction was completed late last year by EmPower Solar of Island Park.

The system will offset an estimated 63 percent of the campus' energy needs, and save the Sisters of St. Joseph some \$22,000 in electricity costs a year, NextEra said. The contracted price of energy from the system is around 14 cents a kilowatt-hour, said Tara Rogers, spokeswoman for the Sisters. That's well below the approximately 19 cents average LIPA customers pay.

NextEra, of Jupiter, Florida, will maintain the system under a 25-year contract, in which all the power is

LIPA approved “community distributed generation net metering” in early 2016 to allow home and business customers to collectively build green-energy sources and share in the benefits among “members.” It can be cheaper for customers than individual home solar installations because of the members can share in the cost savings of building a larger array, LIPA said.

Community solar has a relatively small impact on the overall LIPA rate base, according to LIPA’s analysis at the time the program was approved. Each 12 megawatts of solar will have \$1.95 million cost impact, an amount recovered on the revenue decoupling mechanism on LIPA bills. For the Brentwood project, that means a cost of around \$165,000.

The Sisters’ solar array, consisting of 3,192 panels, is located on five acres designated as “degraded woodlands” beside a rain garden. The Sisters have a Sustainable Land Ethic Statement that encourages green building and sustainable uses.

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The Sisters are “truly delighted to use some of our sacred land to create a nonpolluting, clean, reliable and renewable source of energy,” Sister Helen Kearney, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph, said in a statement. The project “furthers our mission and balances our communal needs and the needs of the Earth.” Some 150 trees were removed for the project, and 60 were replanted.

David Schieren, chief executive of EmPower, said the project’s 1 megawatt output is the largest his company has built to date, and noted the attractiveness of community solar already has put larger jobs on his to-do list in coming months.

EmPower worked with the Peconic Land Trust to analyze the property and find the best place to build, he said. The solar array connects to the LIPA grid at a single point, but is able to credit multiple accounts for hundreds of sisters’ apartments and administrative offices on campus through five different meters, at least initially.

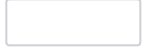
Each month, the Sisters of St. Joseph will receive credits to their various PSEG electric accounts based on how much energy is generated by the system, which is estimated to produce 1.2 million kilowatt-hours a year. The Sisters will be billed for their usage from NextEra based on a pre-set kilowatt-hour cost, Schieren said, adding that the LIPA model, initially approved statewide, offers flexibility for a vast array of new solar

“Before community solar, there was no way to do this,” Schieren said.

By Mark Harrington

mark.harrington@newsday.com  @MHarringtonNews

Mark Harrington, an 18-year Newsday veteran, covers energy, wineries, Indian affairs and fisheries.



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