



The Chairman's Corner

by

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DPW SOLAR PROJECT

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"It's a significant project that's now producing a lot of electricity," Columbia County Climate Smart Coordinator/Senior Planner Don Meltz said recently of the 187kW solar installation at the county's main Department of Public Works garage on County Route 23B. The project, which is part of the continuing effort to reduce taxpayer expenditures while simultaneously adding value to county infrastructure, was completed in late 2023.

The installation included a much-needed new roof on the DPW garage. The solar installation will not only offset the electrical usage at the garage, but, through remote net metering, offset electrical costs in other county buildings as well. The useful life of the solar array is projected at 20 years.

Meltz added that as the county applies for additional grants through NYSERDA's Clean Energy Communities Program, the DPW solar installation "will provide us with a large chunk of points to help us qualify for some significant NYSERDA grants over the course of 2024."

When it comes to overall county electrical usage, Meltz said that "through a NYSERDA program, we track the electric energy used at the 23 county buildings that are over 1,000 square feet. From the data that's been uploaded to that program, the county used 1,927,890 kilowatt hours (kWh) in 2022 – the latest full year data I have -- at those 23 buildings. The DPW solar array is designed to produce 220,639 kWh/year. Doing the math, that comes out to 11.4% of the county's electrical usage at those 23 buildings."

"Working with Centrica, who has successfully guided us through other energy enhancement projects under the UESC program where our capital expenses are offset by energy savings, we developed a plan to completely re-roof the DPW garage with added insulation and structural components that would support solar panels," said Stuyvesant Town Supervisor and county Public Works Committee Chairman Ron Knott. "Now not only do we look forward to generating enough electricity to power this building, but offset costs at other meters that the county is billed for."

Looking ahead, another major energy upgrade is underway at the Department of Social Services building at 25 Railroad Avenue, Hudson, which has seen new boilers installed and go online prior to the 2023-24 winter heating season. This year, the project is set for completion as the roof is replaced, the remainder of the HVAC systems upgraded, and a 50kW solar array estimated to offset 50 percent of the building's electric costs installed. When that project is complete, its tracking chart will be added to the Climate Smart page.

The DSS project, Meltz explained, faces restrictions in that when excess supply is created onsite, it does not automatically mean that the extra can necessarily be accepted back onto the electric grid. "Mainly this is due to the condition of the electrical grid in that area. That's one of the things we're up against, is the quality of the grid in different areas. In the case of the DPW, the garage is in an area with a lot of capacity to handle both the inputs and the outputs, while the DSS area is more limited," he said.

The DPW rooftop solar tracking site can be seen at <https://climatesmart.columbiacountyny.com/PVtrack>

The county Climate Smart Communities website can be visited at <https://climatesmart.columbiacountyny.com/home>