



For Immediate Release: 06/15/16

Audrey Zibelman, Chair

Contact:

Jon Sorensen | Jon.Sorensen@dps.ny.gov | (518) 474-7080

<http://www.dps.ny.gov>

<http://twitter.com/NYS DPS>

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Here Comes the Sun: More Solar Power Projects Connecting to the Grid

— Efforts Are Paying Off In Moving Large-Scale Solar Projects Forward —

ALBANY — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today received a Department of Public Service staff report that the four-year boom in solar power development is continuing in New York – and growing even larger and faster, with applications increasing from 1,200 in 2010 to more than 11,000 last year.

“New York is in an enviable position with our rapid deployment of new solar projects and other clean energy resources,” said Audrey Zibelman, Chair of the Public Service Commission. “We want to take maximum advantage of consumer interest in solar power and we are actively working with developers and utilities to make sure that we create processes and systems that support Gov. Cuomo’s clean energy goals and that allow good solar projects to move forward expeditiously consistent with maintaining public safety and system reliability.”

While more work must be done, efforts to remove the obstacles and improve the approval procedures that have delayed the interconnection of several large-scale solar projects around the state are paying off, the staff reported.

“In recent years, the number of interconnection applications submitted to the utilities and the complexity of the projects proposed have increased significantly,” said Michael Worden, Deputy Director, Electric, Office of Electric, Gas and Water for the New York Department of Public Service (DPS). Worden provided an update on the interconnection efforts underway by DPS, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and the New York Power Authority.

“We are making significant strides forward in improving the overall interconnection process in New York,” Worden told the Commission. “We do, however, understand that continued struggles and issues still exist in the interconnection process and more work is needed.”

Among the remediation efforts underway are streamlining the approval process by utilities in order for a solar project to be built and connected to the grid and developing new standards to help both developers and utilities to work on solar developments that have the best chance of success both economically and integrating with the electric distribution system in a particular area.

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The Commission also took important steps earlier this year when it approved several new regulations to speed the interconnection approval process. While residential solar projects are proceeding quickly – part of a 600 percent increase in New York since 2012 – utilities and private developers are having more problems connecting large solar projects. These include solar installations to power commercial and industrial projects, as well as large solar projects that are part of New York State's efforts to bring solar power to entire neighborhoods.

Known as "Community Distributed Generation," these projects are intended to serve customers who cannot place solar projects on their homes or apartment buildings or in areas where a large-scale system can serve many homes and businesses more economically. The state's first "Shared Renewables" project is now under construction north of Albany.

The Halfmoon Community Solar Project will feed solar energy to the grid and allow more than 100 residential customers, including some low-income residents, to participate in clean power generation and save money on their electricity bills.

These and other initiatives are part of Governor Cuomo's long-term energy strategy called REV – Reforming the Energy Vision. Along with Community Distributed Generation, solar funding from the Governor's NY-SUN program and other REV developments, New York has become one of the most-active states for solar and other renewable power projects in the country.

Among the changes adopted by the Commission in March are new requirements for pre-application reports from developers and new deadlines that both utilities and developers must meet. The state has also launched an Interconnections Technical Working Group that includes representatives of solar developers, utilities and state officials. The state has also appointed Interconnection Ombudsmen at both DPS and NYSERDA to help resolve disputes, identify critical issues and projects and develop maps to help developers and utilities to identify the best locations for solar development.

"Keeping these efforts visible and open to the public is also important," Worden told the Commission. He said additional information and useful data will be provided through an enhanced Interconnection web page on www.dps.ny.gov, including:

- voluntary steps that are being taken by both developers and utilities to reduce wait times and cancel insufficient projects;
- interconnection queue information; and,
- plans for standardized measures that can speed solar development in all parts of the state.