

New Solar Surges in Gateway Region Despite Pandemic

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ST. LOUIS - The pandemic has prompted many people to make their households more sufficient, and for some St. Louis area residents, that means investing in solar power. Twin programs, Grow Solar St. Louis and Grow Solar Metro East, make this process easier and more affordable.

In 2020, more than 60 property owners have already committed to go solar through the programs. All are expected to be producing electricity before the end of the year. The 500 kW of new capacity will offset over 700,000 pounds of carbon dioxide in their first

year of operation and save solar homeowners roughly \$40,000 on electricity bills collectively in the same time period.

“Another 60 households are actively considering their own commitments, and hundreds of people are joining us to learn all about solar,” said Peter Murphy, Solar Program Director for the Midwest Renewable Energy Association, which is co-facilitating the programs with local sponsors. “It’s really exciting to see how much interest there is in solar in the Gateway Region as we approach the September 30 program deadline.”

The Grow Solar Metro East and Grow Solar St. Louis programs offer free educational sessions and volume pricing. The goal is to bring residents and small business owners around the Gateway region together to lower the price of solar while simultaneously increasing the deployment of clean energy.

Grow Solar Metro East began in 2016 in Godfrey, IL with the help of local organizations and a partnership between Lewis and Clark Community College and the Midwest Renewable Energy Association (MREA). Since then has resulted in more than 175 local solar installations. In 2019, the EarthWays Center of the Missouri Botanical Garden partnered with Washington University in St. Louis and MREA to pilot a similar program in St. Louis City and County.

Last year, 137 properties in the Gateway region adopted solar through these programs. These systems are calculated to reduce CO₂ emissions by 2.3 million lbs or avoid 1.1 million lbs of coal consumption in their first year alone. This is equivalent to the annual carbon sequestration of 1,240 acres of U.S. forests (Source: [EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions Equivalencies Calculator](#)).

The 2020 Grow Solar St. Louis program has expanded its geographical area to include the entirety of the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County and St. Charles County. Eligibility for Grow Solar Metro East includes Calhoun County in addition to Madison County, St. Clair County, and Monroe County.

In addition to offering homeowners a lower base price, Grow Solar Metro East and Grow Solar St. Louis offers a series of four price breaks as the program hits specific participation benchmarks. The program has already achieved the third of five price breaks, which will result in a 1.5 percent discount for all participants. That is in addition to state and federal incentives that can cover a large portion of the cost of going solar. All together, these incentives make 2020 the best year for Illinois and Missouri homeowners to go solar.

The program’s participation deadline is September 30 for homeowners interested in participating this year before state and federal solar incentives decline further. Anyone

who signs a contract by then is still guaranteed a 2020 installation or a 4 percent rebate. Interested homeowners can attend one of the last two free, virtual Power Hour education sessions to learn more about solar, the group-buy program, and sign-up for a free site assessment with the program's installer, StraightUp Solar.

Through a competitive selection process, an advisory committee chose St. Louis-based StraightUp Solar as the program's solar installer. They offer high quality solar installations, certifications for solar work, emphasize education and customer service. StraightUp Solar also has an excellent history in working in solar group buy programs and is familiar with the region.

The Grow Solar programs enable residents to save resources and improve local energy security, conserve energy, and reduce long-term energy costs. Schedules of upcoming educational webinars and a sign up form for each program can be found at GrowSolarSTL.org and GrowSolarMetroEast.org