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Solar canopies are an innovative option to increase revenue, lower costs and green-up your operations - by Scott Howe

February 01, 2019 - Green Buildings



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Solar energy offers many advantages for property owners and real estate developers. In this article we will explore solar canopies; one of the lesser known but more innovative approaches for deploying solar energy. Solar canopies, also known as solar carports, are structures with integrated PV panels that are typically installed in parking lots, essentially a carport made out of solar panels.

In November, Massachusetts launched the new Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) solar incentive program. The program offers many advantages to property owners and developers including additional incentives known as “adders” for projects such as low income housing, rooftop installations and energy storage. Canopies receive the highest adder at \$.06/watt, which equates to approximately \$120,000 for every 100 kW of solar installed.

Solar Canopy at Herb Connolly Chevy - Framingham, MA

Solar Canopy at Stonehill College - Easton, MA

Canopies are particularly attractive because they give building owners a range of options to best suit their needs. If your roof already has a solar energy system on it, lack of additional rooftop space is probably the most obvious reason to consider a canopy. However, canopies offer other advantages

as well. They provide shelter for parked cars, an option that appeals to tenants' employees, and can save your parking lot from the wear and tear of plowing during New England winters. They are also a great match for electric vehicle charging stations. Finally, canopies offer great curb appeal because they not only look great, but make a positive statement about your sustainability efforts.

When installing a solar canopy, building owners have several options to consider, chief among them they are the ability to:

- Use the energy to reduce their own building's energy bills, this is known as a behind the meter system;
- Sell the energy directly to the utility, known as a standalone system; or
- Simply lease access to their parking lot to a solar provider who will own the system.

Solar canopies can be installed on most existing parking lots, and are designed to fit your specific site to maximize coverage, minimize snow removal and manage water runoff. We expect to see a significant up-tick in solar canopies going up in 2019 due not only to the new SMART incentives, but also to take advantage of the last year of the full federal investment tax credit at 30%. In particular, buildings in greater Boston located in Eversource East (formerly NStar) territory will be good candidates for canopies. Open space is limited in this highly developed area, but there are a plethora of parking lots and the attractive, higher incentive "blocks" in the SMART program are still open in this territory.

So take a fresh look at this untapped asset - your parking lots, because along with rooftop solar they, present an excellent opportunity to generate additional revenue for your business while reducing your carbon footprint. A qualified solar provider can help you think through your best options, but reach out quickly, before the incentives start to decline.

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