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Is solar right for your business? Take a checklist approach

October 24, 2013 - Green Buildings

In this column, I talk a lot about the financial benefits of solar. Frankly, it is and should be the number one consideration for businesses as they explore whether or not to invest in solar. This month, let's get back to basics and look at the practical considerations to take into account before deciding if solar is truly a good match for your business. Taking a checklist approach can help you get started:

1) How "good" is your roof for solar? There are a few factors to consider:

- * Usable Space: Your roof may be large, but it's the usable space that matters - setback, RTU's (Roof Top Units) and shading must be taken into account to determine the size of your system.
- * Support Structure: Building codes and load factors need to be considered. A structural engineer will need to determine if your structure is suitable for solar.
- * Age of Roof and Surface Integrity: Solar PV (photovoltaic) systems will last 25 years, so new roof surfaces (typically less than 5 years old) are strong candidates. Old roofs (typically more than 15 years old) can also be good candidates. Roofs in the mid-range of 5-15 years will need a closer look.

2) How is your building oriented on its parcel? The sun travels from East to West across the South, so solar panels are typically installed in a "southerly" fashion. The better the building or land is oriented to the South, the better the panel layout and the more production you'll get from the system.

3) How shaded is your building or property? If trees, nearby buildings or other structures cause shade over areas where solar PV panels might be placed, they need to be addressed. There are some technical solutions that can be employed to address issues with shade, but the best solution is to remove the shade if possible.

4) What is the best financial model for your business? Many property owners and businesses in Massachusetts are eligible for both state and federal financial incentives. At the federal level, a 30-percent investment tax credit (ITC) is available.

At the state level, SRECs (Solar Renewable Energy Certificates) come into play. SRECs are certificates earned by solar system owners based on the amount of energy they generate. The SREC program is in the process of being updated for 2014.

If your property gets a positive score on the list above, you too might be able to take advantage of the financial and "green" benefits of solar energy. An experienced solar project developer can help get you started.

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