

# Solar Power is Good for the Economy!

By JoDee Powers, Economic Development Specialist

Whether you are a business owner or a citizen trying to make ends meet, keeping your energy bill down is always a plus. Utility rates can only go up and according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA) Colorado's electricity prices increased 33% from 2005-2015. One significant way to reduce your electric bill is through solar technology. The public interest in solar makes the cost of getting electricity from the sun has become more competitive with traditional power sources. The price for solar is coming down and with government incentives and net metering, placing solar panels on your home or business has become economically viable.

Currently, the traditional cost of a quality solar power system for your home or business is about \$3.20-\$3.50 per watt. The average use of a residence is about 4,000 watts, costing the home or business owner between \$12,000-\$15,000, BEFORE incentives and tax breaks. This means a pay back period of generally 10 years or less.

Colorado offers some good incentives for businesses and residents to install solar panels. One of these options is Colorado Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE). According to C-PACE's official site, "C-PACE enables owners of eligible commercial and industrial buildings to finance up to 100% of energy efficiency. Financing is provided by Capital Providers at competitive rates with repayment terms up to 20 years. C-PACE repayment is facilitated through your County's property tax assessment process, which is placed on the building owners property tax bill."

These energy projects are permanently affixed to the property, so if sold, the assets and the billing would go with the property. According to [www.pacnation.us](http://www.pacnation.us), "Property owners love PACE because they can fund projects with no out-of-pocket costs. The annual energy savings for a PACE project usually exceeds the annual assessment payment, so property owners are cash flow positive immediately."

Though C-PACE is for commercial or business owners, residential homeowners can apply for a Colorado Residential Energy Upgrade (RENU) Loan. According to the Colorado Energy Office, "The RENU Loan program is a statewide residential loan program sponsored by the Colorado Energy Office (CEO), in partnership with Elevations Credit Union."

Other incentives for commercial and residential owners include a 30% Federal tax break and the possibility of "net metering", or selling back your excess energy to Empire Electric Association.

Feel like this still won't fit into your budget? Try Solar Barnraising!! This not for profit was founded about 5 years ago by John Lyle and Will Reitveld out of La Plata

County. Their goal was to make solar panels more affordable to low income residents in La Plata, Archuleta and Montezuma counties. The concept was taken from the idea of helping your neighbor "Raise his barn". The owner purchased the supplies and everyone around showed up to help get the barn up in a matter of days. The same principle applies here; the owner purchases the supplies and engineering costs, gathers his/her friends and neighbors and gets their solar panels installed nearly free. John reminded me that, years ago, the Rural Electric Association (REA) used volunteers in a system much like this to get their electric poles and infrastructure put in place.

John Lyle said that Solar Barn Raising reduces the overall cost of getting solar panels by nearly 50%. So instead of costing \$12,000+ for a 4,000 watt system it could be about \$6,000. With the incentives and loans available you could reduce your bill by about 50% and pay off your system in 6 years.

The Solar Barn Raising staff helps owners with the engineering and specifications, the ordering of materials and site management. Recently they've begun to utilize interns to help with this process. Owners pay for the material at wholesale cost plus 15% to cover the organization's overhead. For more information contact John or Will through their website; [www.solarbarnraising.org](http://www.solarbarnraising.org)