

FAQ

South Church Solar Electric Project

1. Why did we select SunBug as the preferred integrator?

They offered high-efficiency solar panels, which produce the most power per square foot. They offered a fixed discount from the National Grid rate, which means we save money on our electrical bill if National Grid's rates go up, down, or stay the same.

2. Who is SunBug Solar?

A locally-owned solar energy service and consulting company based in Somerville, MA. They have installed more than 100 solar energy systems in eastern Massachusetts. They have excellent references.

3. Who owns the system?

Great Green Enterprises based in Brookline, MA. It is owned by Charles Churchill. His goal is to help communities realize green, renewable energy solutions.

4. Who would our agreement be with?

The owner, GGE. GGE will contract with SunBug to design, install, operate and maintain the system.

5. Who makes the solar panels?

SunPower, a major provider of solar panels with years of experience in the industry. SunPower has large financial resources, since they are now majority-owned by the French energy giant, Total. The panels come with a 25 year performance warranty.

6. Who makes the inverter?

Fronius, an Austrian company with an excellent reputation in this business. The inverter has a 20 year warranty.

7. Are these systems reliable?

Very reliable. They have no moving parts. The basic technology has been in use for more than 25 years.

8. How does the owner make money at this?

Owner gets federal investment tax credit and accelerated depreciation, which South Church as a non-profit can't get. Owner gets sREC's (solar Renewable Energy Credit) which can be sold on a market in MA. And owner receives our (low) payment for the electricity generated.

9. What motivates the owner to keep the system working?

If it's not producing electricity we don't pay, and the owner doesn't get sRECs. Also, the owner has to pay us for savings not delivered.

10. What if the owner still doesn't keep it working?

Ultimately, the owner would be in default. We can take possession of the system and operate it ourselves. Equipment warranties would transfer to the church.

11. What happens when it snows?

Solar panels don't make electricity when covered with snow. Snow melts off panels more rapidly than shingles. Snow guards will be installed to prevent sheets of snow from falling off the roof.

12. How much do panels weigh?

These panels, with supporting structure, weigh 2.9 pounds/ square foot. For comparison, the shingles weigh 4.25 pounds/square foot (one layer).

13. How will we assess if there will be a negative impact on our existing cracks in the sanctuary plaster?

We plan to hire a structural engineer to review the analysis of the provider's engineer, and to tell us if there is any increased risk to the sanctuary plaster.

14. When was our roof last shingled?

It was done in 2002 with 50-year shingles. The roof condition is very good.

15. Will solar panels invalidate our roof warranty?

They shouldn't. SunBug's experience is that manufacturers and installers are getting familiar with solar panels, and don't have a problem with them. SunBug will be responsible for any damage they may cause during installation.

16. What happens at the end of the contract (20 years)?

We have four options:

1. Buy the system at a pre-determined price.
2. Renew the agreement for 5 more years.
3. Remove the system. Share the cost with owner, but our share is capped.
4. Remove and reinstall the system for 10 year renewal term.

17. Who carries insurance for the system?

The owner carries comprehensive insurance that covers damage to the system, and liability for any damage (to property or persons) caused by the system.

18. What does the Andover Preservation Commission think?

In a preliminary review they said "South Church is well-positioned for this because a solar array on the south side won't be visible from Town." A formal review is part of permitting.

19. If this is such a good deal, why isn't everybody doing it?

It's new. In recent years equipment prices have come down and incentives have gone up, to the point where it's becoming very attractive for small systems. Mass media advertisements for solar systems are appearing. SunBug would be happy to talk with you about installing a system on your home or business. Not all locations are suitable.