

State grant pays for new panels at nonprofit housing



MARK TEIWES/Staff photo

From left, Toby Ast of Preservation of Affordable Housing Inc., Mayor Kim Driscoll and Andy Brydges of Massachusetts Clean Energy Center stand before recently installed solar panels outside Salem Fairweather yesterday.

A celebration of solar power

By MATTHEW K. ROY
STAFF WRITER

SALEM — A nonprofit that operates an affordable-housing complex for senior citizens and the disabled yesterday celebrated a new installation of solar panels paid for with a \$256,000 state grant.

Three rows of ground-mounted

panels are expected to generate about 35,000 kilowatt hours a year in electricity for Preservation of Affordable Housing Inc., the owner of Salem Fairweather, a building with 127 apartments at 40R Highland Ave. The output amounts to 8 to 10 percent of the building's annual electricity load, or about \$5,400 a year in "free" power, according to the owner.

Based on current energy prices, it would take nearly 50 years for the solar panels to pay for themselves. Andy Brydges, program director at the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, acknowledged that the "payback isn't what it would be today."

He said the grant reflects an "early stage" approach to solar investment that predates the 2009

formation of the Clean Energy Center, which is responsible for accelerating job growth and economic development in the state's clean energy industry.

"Now, we're at a much different place," Brydges said. The cost of solar panels is half of what it was at the time the Fairweather

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Theresa Girard, left, and Shirley Kenney, Salem Fairweather Apartments residents, applaud at yesterday's presentation about the solar panels.

FAIRWEATHER: State grant pays for new solar panels

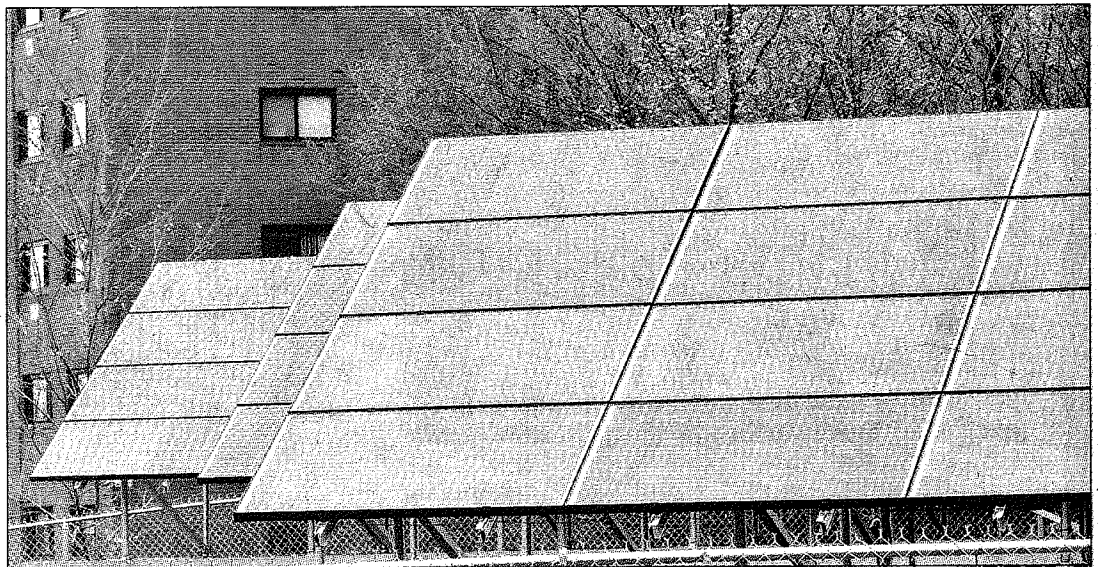
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project was developed, he said.

The state would also no longer give out such a large grant, Brydges said. It now uses tax incentives to encourage a third party — not the building owner or the tenants — to pay for solar panels at a nonprofit facility like the Fairweather.

At a gathering yesterday with residents and management officials at the Salem property, Richard Sullivan, the state's secretary of energy and environmental affairs, touted advances in renewable energy the state has made since Gov. Deval Patrick took office. More than 11,000 people now work in the field, a 65 percent increase since Patrick took office more than four years ago.

The number of companies have jumped from 30 to more than 200, he said. Cambridge-based Zapotec Engery



New solar panels are installed behind Salem Fairweather.

installed the panels in Salem.

They will help bring Massachusetts closer to the governor's goal of creating 250 megawatts of solar power by the year 2017, according to Sullivan.

"You really are on the cutting edge," he said at the event. Mayor Kim Driscoll

highlighted the strides the city has made, including replacing a third of the downtown streetlights with more efficient bulbs, saving \$38,000 a year.

"Everybody is being more efficient," she said. "It's not just something we're doing because it's in fashion. It really does matter."

Toby Ast, manager of energy initiatives for the owner, said the solar panels will complement the high-efficiency boilers, lighting and windows already in place at Salem Fairweather.

"I have my fingers crossed for a nice, sunny summer," he said.