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'Return on investment' is four to five years

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Community Center, 730 Hopkins Road. For more info, visit solarizeamherst.org.

To encourage participation, the town is also waiving its \$200 electrical permit fee for property owners who sign a contract with one of the three installers by June 5. The program runs between May 9 and July 31.

A 4- to 5-kilowatt system is sufficient for most small residences and costs between \$10,000 and \$12,000, but that cost is cut by half after various rebates, Delamere said. Most homeowners can expect to recoup their upfront cost in four to five years, he said.

"Then after that it's all free electricity,"

he said. "The return on investment is about four to five years."

The roof-mounted photovoltaic panels degrade to about 80 percent efficiency after 20 years, Delamere said. An inverter in the basement to convert direct current to alternating current lasts 10 to 15 years.

Installing a system can result in considerable savings for homeowners over the long term, he said.

"Any excess power that you produce actually reverses the electric meter," he said. "If you're producing more power than you're using, like on a sunny day in the summertime, you'll be reversing your electric meter so you get a credit for later on in the evening or different times in the year."

The solarize campaign is one of at least

four initiatives the town's Clean Energy Communities Committee is completing for the town to become a Clean Energy Community, a program of New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, and become eligible for a \$250,000 grant.

The Town Board today will consider purchasing an electric vehicle for the town fleet. The town has also trained building inspectors to be qualified to review solar plans and do inspections of solar installations and is adopting a unified solar permit, which are standards from NYSERDA that municipalities should follow.

"The weather patterns are really changing so everybody's getting more interested in doing what they can to save the planet," Delamere said.