

ClimateSmart Loan Program enables Boulder County homeowner to go solar

By Teresa Foster



I recently became the proud owner of an electrical generating system on my roof! None of this would have been possible without Boulder County's ClimateSmart Loan Program, but it was a long journey getting to this point.

When I bought my townhome in 2006, I had dreamed of installing solar panels but wasn't eligible for Xcel Energy's solar rebate program because I live in Longmont, nor was I sure whether or not the roof had the correct orientation (it faces east/west).

So first things first – I had my first energy audit in 2007 conducted by the Green Heart Institute (formerly called ConservED) that evaluated my home's energy usage and my overall carbon footprint. The next step was to sign up for a blower door test and infrared camera audit through the Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC). The results showed considerable leakage and little attic insulation. No wonder my utility bills were so high! I went ahead and had my home air sealed and insulated, and was eligible for the *Insulate Colorado* rebate program, which paid a percentage of the cost of the attic insulation.

In summer of 2008, a Boulder group organized *Yes on IA*, an initiative that would allow homeowners to borrow money for renewable energy and efficiency measures, but the loan would stay with the home even if it were sold.

Fast forward to November 2008 – Boulder County residents passed the initiative by a 63 percent margin – and this was the first legislation of its kind to be passed by voters in the U.S. I actually felt a glimmer of hope because this would make it possible for me to afford a solar photovoltaic (PV) system.

The big day arrived in March 2009, when the CRC announced sign-ups for the mandatory ClimateSmart Loan workshops - the first step in becoming eligible for the loan. The workshop was informative and while there were many questions, I already knew what I wanted to have done. I immediately contacted Bella Energy to have them bid on a system, and they informed me that an east-facing roof would work for a PV system, although it wouldn't produce electricity at its highest capacity. I also prepared to submit plans to my HOA to get their approval.

The whole process to get the loan was very straightforward thanks to the ClimateSmart™ timeline that clearly explained each step. It involved quite a bit of paperwork and specific deadlines but overall the process was fairly easy. However, I experienced several obstacles while applying for the Longmont solar rebate. Initially there were no funds available, but since another project canceled, it freed up funds for my rebate. When I found out I was eligible, I felt like I had won the lottery! However, my rebate would be slightly less than \$3 per watt because of the east-facing orientation of the solar panels. Furthermore, accepting the rebate meant that my system had to be installed very quickly. That put quite a bit of pressure on the installer, Bella Energy, and thus, they had to install a slightly smaller system than was originally bid on, leaving a balance of approximately \$1,250 that must be spent within 180 days. The big decision now is whether to install a deck cover (for morning heat gain) or a tankless water heater (on-demand water heater).

The increase in my property taxes is only \$150 per month, plus I've already received my \$7,000 rebate from Longmont Power & Communications. I will also get a significant federal tax credit.

The bottom line is that people with smaller dwellings can benefit from this program. Solar systems don't have to be large. Every bit of energy generated from our rooftops reduces the amount of CO₂ emitted from coal-fired power plants.

If you want to learn how you can afford to install renewable energy features on your home today and start saving money on energy bills immediately, visit ClimateSmartLoanProgram.org. Be sure to pre-register to attend one of the popular financing workshops beginning July 28th, 2009.

