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Stamford office landlord likes idea of solar

Sustainability a key: 'Green' important for some tenants

Richard Lee

Commercial building owners throughout the region are embracing the philosophy of "green" construction to attract tenants, and now the owner of a Stamford office complex is adding its name to the roster.

New York-based Benenson Capital Partners, owner of 1600 Summer St., a six-story, 260,000-square-foot building in Stamford, has completed the installation of a 312-panel, roof-top solar panel project designed to reduce electricity costs for the complex.

The panels, installed in December, will produce 100 kilowatts per hour during peak periods, offsetting the power drawn by tenants Aon Corp., [GE Asset Management](#) and Philips Electronics, [North American Corp.](#)

"We draw anywhere from 600 to 1,600 kws per hour," said [Gary Sedoruk](#), managing director, asset management at Benenson. "We do anything we can to reduce energy -- recycling and shrinking our carbon footprint. It's a matter of being a good citizen."

Not including government assistance, the cost of the project was \$465,000, and the payback period will be five to seven years, said Sedoruk, commenting that Connecticut is among a few states that offer substantial financial incentives for solar installations.

While the building is fully occupied, should an opening occur, having solar panels will impress potential tenants, said [Jacob Kriss](#), spokesman for the U.S. Green Building Council, noting that they are important for Leadership in Energy and [Environmental Design](#) (LEED) certification.

"Solar panels for on-site generation are just one of the many ways buildings can mitigate their environmental impact," he said, adding that building owners often install low water-flow fixtures and waterless urinals or install improved insulation during a refurbishing.

Built in the 1970s, the building has been periodically upgraded, and removed materials have been recycled, Sedoruk said.

It is necessary to upgrade an office building to match the needs of innovative and forward-thinking tenants, said [Richard Kessler](#), chief operating officer at Benenson.

"From the newly designed lobby and Euro Cafe to the Wi-Fi connected public areas and the fully equipped conference center, every effort has gone into fostering creative interactions," he said in prepared comments. "Providing an efficient energy source for the building was a natural next step, which reflects the Benenson tradition of caring for our communities and standing at the forefront of innovative fossil fuel-free environmental technology progresses."

Benenson commissioned [Elliot Isban](#), chief executive officer of American Solar and Alternative Power in Stamford, to oversee the project, which will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 113,147 pounds per year, and sulfur dioxide by 479 pounds per year. It also will cut annual nitrous oxide emissions by 189 pounds.

The reductions are equivalent to cutting a passenger car's annual mileage by 139,808 miles, according to Isban, who said federal and state incentives reduce the cost of the project in the long term.

"Once you put the incentives in, it's a blowout. Benenson Capital Partners is part of a very elite group of companies that have had the foresight to take such a bold step forward toward sustainability," said Isban, adding that the solar panels feature a system that tracks the power produced and benefits to the environment. "We feel good about what we do. It's a win for everybody."

Founded in 1988, American Solar and Power has installed solar panels at sites throughout the region, many at schools. Commenting that a new roof installation at 1600 Summer St., coincided with placement of the solar panels, Isban said the company will use the project to market its services to other commercial building landlords.

More tenants see commercial real estate as an asset when it comes to marketing their services to customers, said [Debbie Korf](#), president of the [Southern Connecticut Building Owners and Managers Association](#).

"Residing in a facility that offers 'green' services -- automatic flushing toilets, automatic sinks, low-voltage lighting, energy-efficient HVAC systems, recycling and 'green' cleaning services -- allows the tenant to illustrate its efforts to be more environmentally conscious," she said.

Some companies are impressed by environmental improvements, and it might play a part in their decision to come to a building, said [John Hannigan](#), a principal in Stamford-based [Choyce Peterson](#), which assists companies in their search for office space and represents clients in negotiations with the landlord.

"Building owners are ahead of tenants on this score. They are paying a lot of attention to LEED and making their buildings more energy efficient. We're talking the Class A and Class B landlords," he said. "The bigger publicly traded tenants are paying attention to this. But it's not at the forefront of smaller tenants."

The philosophy will grow as more sustainable materials and energy-efficient products are developed, Hannigan said.

While some office building owners in the region pursue LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council as another tool to lure tenants, others simply see installing energy-efficient measures as a way to reduce expenses, said [Jonathan Metz](#), senior associate and LEED

accredited professional at Perkins Eastman, a New York-based design firm with an office in Stamford.

"A lot of LEED is good building practice," said Metz, who is involved in several retrofitting projects in Connecticut. "It comes down to whether it will improve the bottom line."