

Coalition working to set up solar purchase in Northwest

By **KAT LUCERO**
Current Staff Writer

Over the past 30 years, Forest Hills resident Jacques Kapuscinski has been following the evolution of solar panels. Early versions of the technology were prohibitively expensive, so he held off on adding them to his home.

More recently, Kapuscinski found out about DC Solar United Neighborhoods (also known as DC SUN), a coalition of local cooperatives that mobilized dozens of homeowners in Mount Pleasant, Petworth and other neighborhoods to add solar panels to their dwellings. The group arranged a discounted bulk purchase, and Kapuscinski wanted the same in Upper Northwest.

So he got a few interested neighbors on his street to band together. Forty people attended the first informational meeting.

Other meetings in Ward 3 have

followed. Tonight, DC SUN will host another one about bulk purchases of solar panels for residents in Ward 3 and parts of Ward 4. It will begin at 7 p.m. at the Cleveland Park Library, 3310 Connecticut Ave. NW.

So far, 21 homeowners in wards 3 and 4 have signed up to be part of the bulk purchase, according to Anya Schoolman, president of DC SUN. That's the minimum number she needs to send out a request for proposals for an installer. Still, she wants more people to get involved — around 40 to 50 by the end of February.

At tonight's meeting, DC SUN representatives will explain each participant's savings in buying the panels in a group — around 20 to 30 percent.

The meeting will also cover the incentives residents will receive from the federal and city government for adopting the energy-effi-

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Council advances plan to bury key Pepco lines

The D.C. Council yesterday took a first step toward an ambitious plan to prevent power outages by burying about a third of Pepco's main feeder lines.

By unanimous first vote, the council endorsed a financing system for the roughly \$1 billion project. It roughly follows recommendations of a task force convened by Mayor Vincent Gray after the 2012 summer derecho — raising about \$500 million from surcharges on Pepco bills, \$375 million from District-backed bonds, and \$125 million from local and federal street-paving funds.

The financing bill requires a second vote. But it

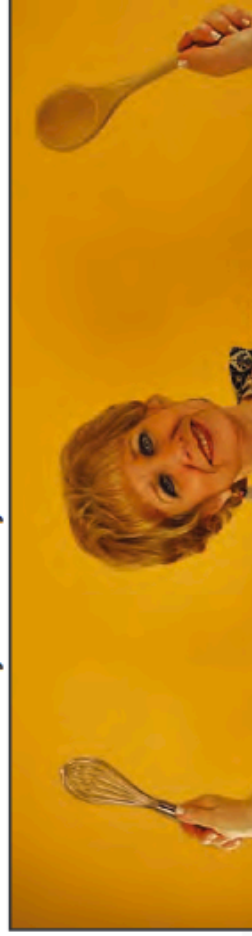
still leaves details of the undergrounding project — including identifying the 50 to 60 most vulnerable feeder lines to bury and setting a schedule for the work — to the D.C. Public Service Commission.

The seven-year project will focus on outlying areas of the city, as most feeders downtown are already buried. Monthly electric bills for the average District homeowner are projected to jump by \$1.50 in the first year of construction, rising to a \$3.25 increase by the seventh year. Low-income ratepayers can be exempted from the extra costs.

— **Elizabeth Wiener**

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SOLAR: Group arranging for Northwest bulk purchase

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cient system. There are also Solar Renewable Energy Credits, tradable certificates that can be sold upfront for a fixed price. Participants receive a credit for every 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity produced by a solar energy system.

Without the bulk purchase, the owner of a typical row house would pay around \$13,500 to \$22,500 to go

solar without counting incentives, according to DC SUN's estimates. With a bulk purchase (and a Solar Renewable Energy Credit upfront payment), the group says, row house owners pony up around \$7,050 to \$11,750 each in initial costs.

Including tax credits and estimated cost savings, homeowners will have spent \$3,330 to \$5,490 after one year, the group says.

Randy Speck, a Chevy Chase

advisory neighborhood commissioner who installed 10 panels at his home five years ago, notes that the costs of solar panels have gone down dramatically recently.

"Our installation cost \$21,000," he said. "We got a third of that paid through rebates from the District government. Another third of the cost was covered by the federal tax credit. By now, we've recovered our cost."