

# Cuts to LIPA green efforts assailed

BY MARK HARRINGTON

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Solar-energy companies and an activist slammed proposed cuts in LIPA's green-energy programs at a public hearing yesterday, saying the local clean-energy market and the climate would suffer.

The criticism came during public hearings on LIPA's proposed 2014 budget. The spending plan holds the line on rates, but relies on cuts in staffing, consulting and renewable energy programs to do it. LIPA has said it expects to meet its green-energy goals despite the reduction.

LIPA's \$3.526 billion 2014 budget, a \$71.9 million reduction from 2013, proposes spending \$94 million on renewable and efficiency programs next year, a \$26 million cut from 2013. The reductions come despite \$24.6 million in new state grants for the programs next year. LIPA's re-

newables budget for next year was drawn up by PSEG.

Bill Feldman, chairman of the Long Island Solar Energy Industries Association, which represents about 30 local installers and distributors, said the overall renewables budget clashes with assertions by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's administration that funding would not be reduced.

"We were assured by the governor's representatives these programs would not be cut," said Feldman, chief operating officer of Empire Clean Energy Supply, a Bohemia distributor. "Imagine my surprise when I saw this proposed budget. I thought, how could this be?"

Tara Bono, marketing manager for EmPower Solar, an Island Park solar energy installer, said reductions in LIPA's solar rebate budget "will no doubt hinder the growth of our company, if not worse."

"What we cannot work with is a rebate that is here today,



Joseph Milillo, right, and Bill Feldman, center, were among those attending public hearings on LIPA's proposed 2014 budget.

capped tomorrow, gone next week, but may return one day," Bono said.

Energy activist Peter Maniscalco, of Manorville, a frequent critic of Cuomo's LIPA reform plan, criticized "devas-

tating cuts" to the renewables budget. Maniscalco charged that the LIPA-PSEG contract "has been a scam from the very beginning," and said the renewables cuts will exacerbate climate change.

LIPA officials said they expect next year to reach the same power-saving goals as this year, despite the lower budget. The budget for solar panel rebates goes from around \$30 million this year to \$11.1 million next year.

Earlier this week, John McMahon, chief operating officer of LIPA, said the general reduction in energy use by customers in 2013 doesn't mean LIPA can nix its plan to add new power sources over the next decade, including at least one big new power plant, in the near term. LIPA is negotiating with power producer Caithness Long Island for a planned 700-megawatt-plus plant in Yaphank by 2018, at a cost estimated at more than \$3 billion.

McMahon said despite the drop in total electricity use by LIPA customers, "we still see growth" during the hottest summer days, and noted that the system is built for peaks.

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