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Homeowners' Solar Rights Act Passes Both Houses

Associations Will Be Required To Adopt Acceptable Design Standards For Solar Systems



Reporting
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CHICAGO (CBS) — A Northbrook couple says their neighbors were more concerned with green lawns than a "green" lifestyle. They were among those statewide who saw a homeowners association blocking their plans for the installation of solar panels on their own home. But, as CBS 2's Vince Gerasole reports, those roadblocks seem to be melting away in the sun.

Solar energy panels seemed like a bright idea for the Goldmans and their sunbathed Northbrook home.

"We have a southern exposure, which is the exposure you want to put up solar panels," said Phyllis Goldman, as she looks up at the sun shining over her two [story](#) roof. "The trees we have don't block it."

Phyllis and her husband Eugene are an environmentally conscious couple who have been recycling since the '70s. Four years ago, they drew up plans for a rooftop installation of several solar panels.

"They don't add to the beauty of the house, but that's not the point of it," said Eugene.

But the Goldmans live in a manicured, almost picture-perfect, private community where they knew outward appearances were subject to the approval of a homeowners association; an association that turned them down, in part over aesthetics.

"The last bastion of fascism is homeowners associations," said Phyllis.

The decision had the green living couple seeing red.

"If you don't want to do it yourself, that's your business, but to prevent somebody else from doing something that would be good for the [environment](#), it's not good," said Phyllis.

Brandon Leavitt owns Solar Service, a company that specializes in solar energy.



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The Illinois Homeowners' Solar Rights Act requires homeowners associations to adopt acceptable design standards for solar systems in buildings up to three stories tall.
CBS

"Even on a cloudy day, we're generating electricity right now," said Leavitt, as we looked at a rooftop display of black solar panels that sit atop the roof of his business in Niles.

He says for decades associations throughout Chicago have blocked solar panel installations. That's in spite of current federal programs offering considerable [financial](#) incentives for their purchase, and the fact that much of what's sold today arguably resembles a standard skylight.

"We think it's a freedom to choose," said Leavitt. "It's a freedom to choose to harvest the energy falling on your property," said Leavitt.

It's a choice now seeing the light of day thanks to Illinois' Homeowners' Solar Rights Act. It requires homeowners associations to adopt acceptable design standards for solar systems in buildings up to three stories tall.

"Somebody just can't say, 'I don't like the way it looks, you can't do it,'" said Leavitt.

Re-energized, the Goldmans are now renewing their plans to power their home with the sun.

"They should be grateful we didn't want to put up a windmill in our backyard," said Phyllis.

The Homeowners' Solar Rights Act was approved by both Houses, and is awaiting Gov. Pat Quinn's signature.

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