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# Burlington County Times

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## Pemberton resident fighting with borough over solar energy costs

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By **Mark Zimmaro** Staff writer

PEMBERTON BOROUGH — The sun was shining on Bruce Buzalski's home on a beautiful spring afternoon in his quiet, age-restricted community.

On days like this, Buzalski envisioned dollar signs as the solar panels on his roof would soak up and store clean, renewable energy.

But for Buzalski to reuse that same energy on a cloudy day, it will cost him.

The excess energy his solar panels produce are sold to the town's energy grid for a very small profit, but on overcast days, when he needs electricity, he has to pay more.

"I've made a \$23,500 investment and it's been a big headache," he said. "But my philosophy is (the borough council) will see me every month until they tell me to shut up. All I want is what should have been done in the first place."

The situation has been a point of contention between the borough resident and the municipality since Buzalski had the panels installed in July.



**Nancy Rokos**

Bruce Buzalski, a resident at Hearststone at Woodfield in Pemberton Borough points to the solar panels he had installed 2012 on his house.



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Circumstances are unique because Pemberton Borough has a community-owned electric company, which purchases power through the American Public Power Association. Only 10 towns in New Jersey own their own electric company and Pemberton Borough is the only one in Burlington County.

The borough is free to determine its own electricity ordinances and determine electricity rates for its customers. The town cannot make a profit on the energy it sells but residents tend to see lower rates than surrounding communities because it buys directly.

In the town of just 1,400 people, Buzalski is one of two solar panel owners and he feels he is being taken advantage of because there are not more people in his situation.

Buzalski said borough residents pay 22 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity. He sells his excess energy to the town,

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but it costs him 18 cents to send it. Therefore, he only makes four cents per kilowatt hour, he says.

On a cloudy day, when his panels are not producing energy, Buzalski said he gets charged 22 cents for energy he believes he could have stored.

"If they let me have a meter that would spin backwards, it would solve everything," Buzalski said.

Pemberton Borough Mayor William Kochersperger said the town doesn't have to budge on its stance. He said backwards meters are not permitted and the town does not have to adjust its rates to buy energy back from residents.

"Why should we have to pay retail for energy when we can get it for wholesale prices?" he asked. "We're not willing to do that. We have a supplier and we buy our energy at wholesale. (Buzalski) believes we owe him something but we don't. He has to follow the rules. We set a tone and a standard in this town for our electric department."

Buzalski isn't the first borough resident to run into solar energy problems with the local government. Resident Ina Cabanas had a system installed on her house in 2005 and fought the town on installation costs.

Cabanas recalled the borough requiring her to spend \$3,500 in start-up engineering costs to have her system installed.

"I basically had to write the borough a blank check," she said. "It was crazy."

Cabanas said solar residents are disadvantaged because the borough is not overseen by the state's Board of Public Utilities.

"If we were a bigger town and we were regulated, we wouldn't have this problem," she said. "Here, we have no choice."

Buzalski said he believes the borough is against residents installing solar energy because it competes with the borough's electric company. He claims the council is making rules to discourage potential owners.

"A lot of the stuff they're doing they are sort of doing on the fly after the fact," Buzalski said. "It took almost a year to even have the panels turned on after they were installed due to the town's shenanigans."

Kochersperger said Buzalski's allegations are untrue.

"I wish everyone in town could have solar panels," Kochersperger said. "Obviously that's not going to happen but we're not doing anything to hurt him. We're not going to bend or break just because he's complaining about it."

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