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Madison Kinkaid

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Solar Panels: Are Aesthetics More Important Than the Environment?

Imagine you decide to install solar panels on your house. You want to do your part in combating the climate crisis as well as save your family money. You've done your research about which panels to get and exactly how to position them on your home. Then you find out that your neighborhood doesn't allow solar panels because someone decades ago decided they weren't aesthetically pleasing.

As the world continues to warm, we look to new energy sources to fuel our needs. Solar energy is the most abundant energy resource on Earth with 173,000 terawatts continuously striking the planet. That is more than 10,000 times the world's total energy use. Unfortunately, many neighborhoods in Omaha aren't allowing residential installation of solar panels because of their aesthetics. Solar energy is the future and solar panels should be allowed, regardless of how they look.

In 1883, Charles Fritz, an American inventor, created the first working solar photovoltaic cell. Photovoltaic (PV) cells work to generate electricity by absorbing sunlight and turning the light energy into an electrical current. Today, one solar PV cell can produce around 1.5 kilowatt hours every day. Installing a solar panel system can provide the electricity needs of an entire home while reducing the emissions released into the atmosphere.

Some people believe that solar panels are ugly or don't fit in to their neighborhoods. These people must be thinking of an outdated look with thick, aluminum frames, white backing, and wires showing. Solar panels continue to evolve and are much more aesthetically pleasing today than they were when they first came on the market. Companies are now able to seamlessly fit solar panels into the designs of homes. Wireless panels are available to avoid the look of wires hanging from the roof and even wired panels are positioned in a way to hide them. Most solar panels now incorporate a sleek, black look, rather than the bulky white that was seen before. If the look of the newer solar panels is still concerning to you, I simply say don't look at them.

Pollution is a growing concern in our society today and with the average U.S. home itself producing 7.5 tons of CO2 equivalents every year, actions need to be taken to work against it. With emissions from manufacturing considered, solar PV's produce less than 15% of the carbon dioxide from a conventional coal-fired power plant. This alone shows the impact just one person can make on working towards reducing pollution in the world.

Solar energy is naturally more sustainable than any fossil fuel because of its endless supply. Sunlight is something we will never run out of, so why would we not be using it to power everything, including our homes? Although sunlight never runs out, solar panels do. But not for 25-30 years. Since solar panels are saving money on energy bills, they will pay for themselves in as little as 6 years.

Solar panels are not only a good investment for the environment, but also for your wallet. Installing solar panels give financial benefits by reducing electric bills, protecting against rising energy costs, earning tax credits, and increasing property value. Since you are producing your own energy, you are no longer reliant on the electric company. When they decide to increase their rates, you are safe because you have energy independence.

Installing solar panels earns purchasers a federal tax credit to lower their tax bill. For systems installed between 2020 and 2022, there is a 26% tax credit. An average solar installation in Nebraska, with a system size of 5 kilowatts, ranges from \$13,338 to \$18,112 before tax credits and other incentives. If you eventually decide to sell your home after the installation of solar panels, you benefit with an increase in value. According to a study done by Zillow, homes with solar panels sell for 4.1% more than those without.

There are two ways to begin making a change in Omaha. First, is with land developers. New neighborhoods should have covenants inspected and updated to allow solar panels on homes. Developers are using the same template of neighborhood covenants that were used 20-30 years ago. Second, if your neighborhood doesn't currently allow panels, talk to your homeowner's association (HOA) about voting to change the covenants to allow solar. Most covenants have a minimum number of members needed to make rules less restrictive.

There are many benefits to using solar energy on residential homes. This includes pollution reduction, sustainability, and financial incentives. Despite the lack of aesthetics for solar panels in the past, they continue to evolve and today have sleek designs that fit into the designs of homes. Solar panels are making the world less reliant on non-renewable resources, and this should not be slowed down because of the way they look.

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