December 10, 2009 - At the request of Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld (D-East Setauket), the Brookhaven Town Board approved a change to the Town Code that will make it easier for residents to power their homes with solar energy. "If our residents are willing to do their part to lessen our dependence on foreign energy sources and take on the expense of installing renewable energy sources," Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld said, "then they should not be penalized by red tape having nothing to do with the solar installation to building codes that have changed over the years. We need to encourage—not discourage—the public from installing renewable energy."

Homeowners installing flat or flush-mounted photovoltaic panels or tiles on the roof of a one- or two-family home will be exempt from the requirement for a building permit. Previously, such work would have required a building permit and review of the existing property by the Town's Building Department. Such a building permit triggers a review by building inspectors which tends to discover other outstanding issues at the home—an oversized shed, an addition to the back porch, etc. In many cases these changes necessitate a variance which then requires additional permit costs and time delays. As a result, a homeowner's desire to install solar could end up costing many times more than what the solar retrofit alone would cost.

In an attempt to encourage the public to take advantage of the current LIPA rebates, state and federal tax breaks, newer more efficient solar systems, and the Town's soon to be launched "Go Solar" program, the councilman proposed this solar-friendly exemption

"I commend the Town of Brookhaven and Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld for leading the charge to streamline the process for homeowners to 'Go Solar' while reaping the benefits of our Solar Pioneer program," said LIPA President and CEO Kevin S. Law. "This comes on the heels of last week's event to kick off our initiative to unify the solar code throughout the service territory, and Brookhaven has already stepped up to the plate to cut the red tape. LIPA will continue to work with both the Nassau and Suffolk County Planning Commissions to advocate streamlining and unifying the approval process for solar installations on Long Island, thus helping our customers to reduce their carbon footprint, increasing our renewable energy portfolio, and creating more clean energy jobs."

"This is another example of how the Town of Brookhaven is making it easier for its residents to make their homes more energy efficient" said Supervisor Mark Lesko. "This further greening of Brookhaven is a victory for its residents as well as the environment."

"Streamlining and simplifying the sometimes cumbersome and confusing permit process for small solar energy systems will lower the cost to consumers and make this great technology available to more people", said Gordian Raacke, Executive Director of the not-for-profit organization, Renewable Energy Long Island (RELI) which is working with villages and towns all over Long Island to develop appropriate permit and inspection procedures for solar and wind energy systems.

"To the average homeowner, installing a solar energy system can be a costly investment. Towns with complicated permitting and licensing requirements add to the cost and further discourage installations. Eliminating the permit process for systems that have proven to be engineered and installed by our contractors to the highest standards, coupled with other incentives, will encourage more homeowners to install systems. This is good for our environment as it lessens our dependence on foreign oil, and provides an excellent source of well paying 'green collar' jobs," said Kevin MacLeod, Chairman of the LI Solar Energy Industries Association (LISEIA). "We at the Long Island Solar Energy Industries Association (LISEIA) applaud the Town of Brookhaven for taking this very important 'bold' step along with the Town of Southampton in recognizing the importance of solar energy. Let this set an example, a model to other towns that might be thinking of changing their permitting processes as well."

Jessica Helm of the Sierra Club applauded the Town's initiative. "Brookhaven is cutting through the red tape between homeowners and solar contractors by getting rid of the unnecessary building permit requirement for rooftop flush-mounted solar. This is a great step for our growing green job sector that will benefit business, residents, and the town," she said.

The Town is continuing to work out the final issues for its "Go Solar/Renewable Energy Initiative" that is part of the
Federal Stimulus package. These funds will assist Brookhaven residents by providing homeowners with loans to retrofit their houses to make them more energy efficient or for the installation of solar photovoltaic or solar thermal (hot water) general panels and other renewable sources of energy such as geothermal and wind. Repayment will be made through reduced energy costs.

Homes located within a Town-designated Historic District, seeking to retrofit with solar, will likewise be exempt from the building permit requirement. However, the homeowner will continue to need to seek the approval of the Historic District Advisory Committee regarding architectural aesthetics prior to any work being started. The HDAC has developed an expedited review process for such simple solar installations and predicts approximately a two-week review period.

"The Town needs to do all that it can to help homeowners reduce their high utility costs while helping them reduce our overall town carbon footprint," said Councilman Fiore-Rosenfeld. "This is one significant way of helping homeowners save while going green."

Brookhaven is not the first town to enact legislation eliminating the need for a building permit for solar retrofits. Southampton did so more than a year ago and has had no problems by doing so.