

# Shining a Light on School Solar: Incentives, Storage, & Savings

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# Introductions

Becky Thompson, CEP; Moderator  
- *Sr. Energy Advisor, Nania Energy Advisors*



Aaron Raftery, Speaker  
- *Solar & Efficiency Advisor, Nania Energy Advisors*



Angie Smith, Speaker  
- *Asst Supt for Operations & CSBO, West Aurora SD 129*



Brian Keller, CEM, LEED AP BD+C, Speaker  
- *Public Schools Sector Strategist, Illinois Shines*



Calvin Cornish, Speaker  
- *Sr. Consultant & Account Exec, Johnson Controls, Inc*



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# Solar Purchasing Options

## DIRECT OWNERSHIP

- District pays for system directly using debt or capital funds
- District owns system and is responsible for operations/maintenance
- Incentives come directly to District
- Avoided energy costs are 2-3x a PPA model

## POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT (PPA)

- Solar provider pays for and installs system
- No upfront cost for the District
- Provider assumes all incentives and charges District a reduced \$/kWh rate
- After end of contract, provider decommissions system or sells to District

# Options Comparison

## DIRECT PURCHASE

- Capital budget required
- District keeps all energy cost savings
- Incentives are District's responsibility
- Performance risk is owned by District
- O&M is District's responsibility

## POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT

- No upfront cost or debt obligation
- Lower overall energy cost savings
- Incentives are provider's responsibility
- Performance risk is shared with provider
- O&M is provider's responsibility

# Federal Incentives Driving Solar Adoption

- ✓ Federal incentives available since 2006
- ✓ Currently available under Inflation Reduction Act (2022)
- ✓ Covers 30-50% of the costs of your solar project
- ✓ Nonprofits get direct payment in lieu of tax credit
- ✓ Incentives set to expire under One Big Beautiful Bill (2025)

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# Federal Solar Incentive Deadlines

**July 4, 2026**

Begin Construction

Spend **5%** of project cost

OR

Begin physical construction

**Dec 31, 2027**

Placed in Service

Project fully operational

Projects only need to meet **ONE** deadline — not both.

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# Reflections on Illinois Solar Market

- ✓ Lucrative incentives
  - Carveout for public schools
- ✓ Utility interconnection is regulated
- ✓ Net metering is available
- ✓ Open to 3<sup>rd</sup> party ownership (PPAs)
- ✓ Multiple, competing solar companies
- ✓ Lessons learned from early adopters



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# Results from Recent Solar RFPs

- ✓ Typically 5-10 qualified respondents
- ✓ Mandatory pre-proposal meeting!!!
- ✓ Request for Proposals, not low bid
- ✓ Interview top-ranked proposers
- ✓ Direct purchase prices: \$2.15/watt to \$2.90/watt
- ✓ PPA prices: \$0.03 to \$0.06/kWh fixed for 20-25 years



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# West Aurora Solar

## Started with PPA

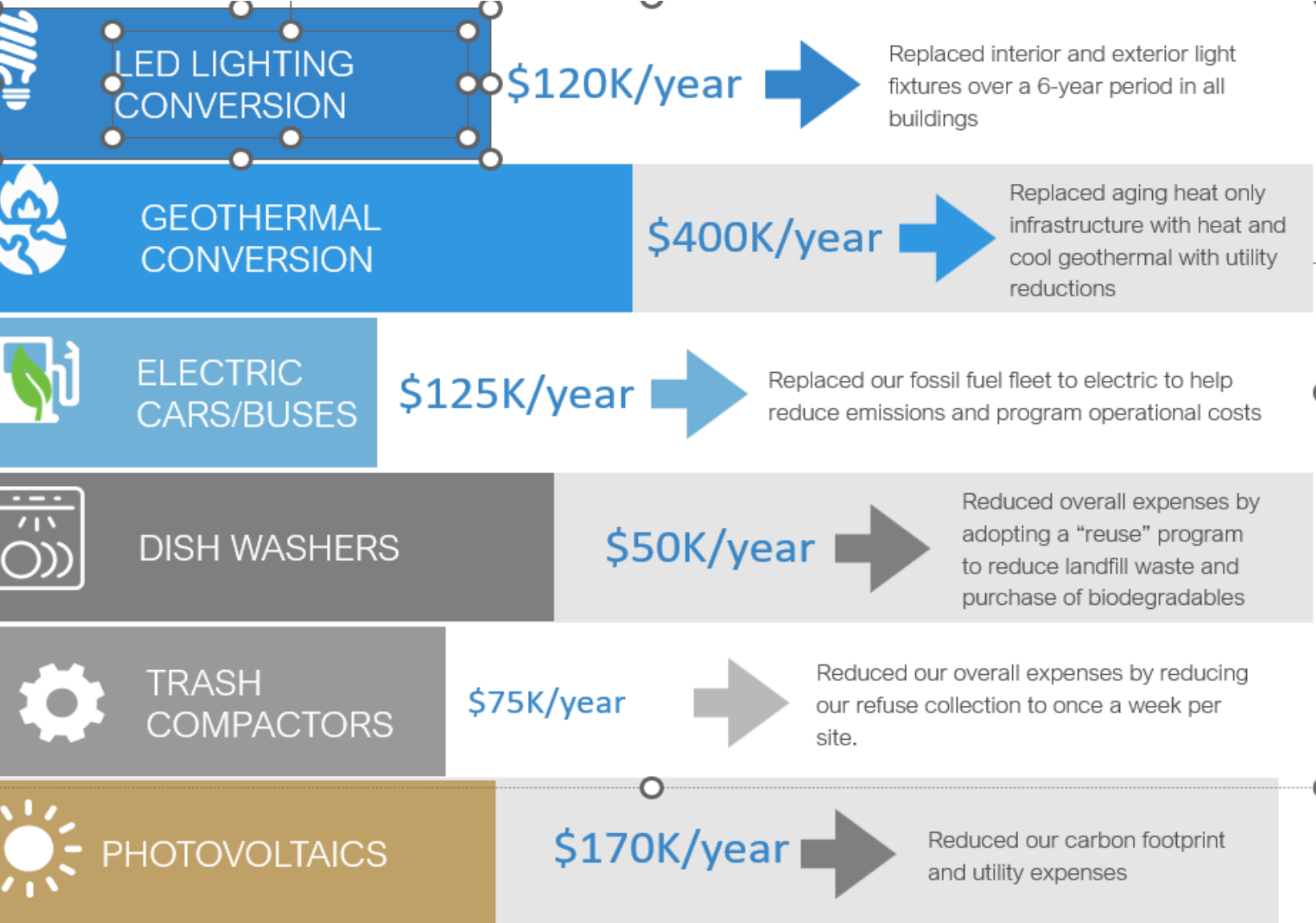
No upfront investment, utilized Solar for All funding  
Energy savings the driver  
Nine roof mounted installations tied to replacement cycle

## Moved to Owning

Finances improved  
Higher projected long-term savings  
Ground mount to be energized soon  
Carport install in conjunction with EV's this summer  
Utilized incentives including federal tax credits

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# The Master Plan with a Phased Approach



**\$940K per year in savings shifted to Capital Projects**

# Insider Tips

## **Involve Tax Expert Early**

Introduce to your architect/CM and make sure they are communicating- much easier than having to recreate later.

## **Don't Budget Tax Credit on First Project If You Can Avoid It**

Timing may not be your friend, don't want first project to negatively impact budget. Let savings fund next project.

## **Safe Harbor Costs**

Pre-pay things like architect services or materials if you can. Cooperative purchasing may jump start.

## **Under Promise, Over Deliver with BOE**

If using the credit to justify project, be conservative. Don't budget energy savings until you have a few years of actual results.

## **Funding Beyond Capital Projects**

Transportation, food service, stacking incentives- ways to bridge gaps.



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# Solar Made Simple: The Illinois Shines Program for Public Schools

Presented by Illinois Shines Program Administrator

April 2026



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# Agenda

**1** Illinois Shines Program Overview

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**2** Getting Underway with Project Planning

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**3** Additional Resources

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# Illinois Shines Program Overview



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# About the Illinois Power Agency



- The [Illinois Power Agency](#) (“IPA” or “the Agency”) was established in 2007
- Committed to the planning and procurement of reliable, efficient, and cost-effective electricity – insulated from improper influence
- Administers incentive programs and procurements to promote renewable and zero-carbon energy generation

## Specific goals and objectives include:



Developing annual electricity procurement plans to ensure adequate, reliable, affordable, efficient, and environmentally sustainable electric service at the lowest total cost over time.



Develop a Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan and implement the programs and procurements contained in the Plan.



Supply electricity from any Agency facilities at cost to one or more of the following: municipal electric systems, governmental aggregators, or rural electric cooperatives in Illinois.



Develop electric generation and co-generation facilities that use indigenous coal or renewable resources, or both, financed with bonds issued by the Illinois Finance Authority.



Conduct competitive procurement processes to procure the supply resources identified in the procurement plan.



Develop and implement a Zero Emission Standard Procurement Plan.

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# About Illinois Shines

Illinois Shines is a state-administered incentive program that encourages the development of solar photovoltaic systems by offering incentives to offset solar development costs.

The Program is designed to:

1. Allow participants to offset project development costs
2. Provide incentives through Illinois utilities purchase of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) produced by projects
3. Support the state's renewable energy goals



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# What's New Under CRGA?



Starting June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act (CRGA) will come into effect. This will bring a key change to the Public Schools category.

## **15-year REC Contract Option will be available**

- Allows for 15% of the REC contract value to be paid upfront payment project is energized
- Remaining balance paid out over the next 6 years
- Reminder: this takes effect starting June 1<sup>st</sup>

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# Benefits of Going Solar with Illinois Shines

Though customers can “go solar” on their own, Illinois Shines provides substantial, additional benefits including:



**Financial incentives  
you may receive**



**Approval and compliance  
monitoring of Approved  
Vendors**



**Educational resources  
and consumer protection  
support**



**Equity opportunities for  
contractors, workforce,  
and your community**

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# Benefits of Going Solar with Illinois Shines

The Illinois Power Agency and Program Administrator take consumer protection very seriously.

The Program has various requirements with which Approved Vendors must comply to ensure consumers are protected.



## Approval and compliance monitoring of Approved Vendors

- 4-to-6-week approval process
- Must renew AV status each year
- Mentorship Program
- Program violations report



## Customer Protection Support

- Help for stranded customers
- Consumer protection working group
- Disclosure form deep dive
- Consumer complaint report

# Getting Underway with Project Planning



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# Solar Financing Types

Illinois Shines provides three common financing options for going solar, including:



## Purchase:

Buy the project outright or finance with a loan.



## Lease:

Make regular payments to the project owner.



## Power Purchase Agreement (PPA):

Pay the project owner for the electricity generated by the project at an agreed upon per kilowatt-hour rate.



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# Success with Illinois Shines and 15-Year REC Contract Timeline

Be the next Jonesboro Elementary CUSD #43, a rural district that found workable solutions to going solar with Illinois Shines by taking advantage of Elective Pay and other incentives, reducing the project cost by 51% and making the decision “a no brainer”.

Originally considered a third-party ownership model, but Elective Pay allowed Jonesboro to own the system and get reimbursed for a portion of the project cost.



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# Public Schools Workshop

Illinois Shines Program Administrator is offering personalized, one-on-one workshops for public schools. These sessions are tailored to your school or district and include:

- Review of your school's Carbon-Free Assessment results
- Discussion of your solar energy potential
- Answers to any questions you may have about project planning, financing, and Illinois Shines incentives
- A walkthrough of how to become your own Approved Vendor

To schedule your session, contact us at [schools@illinoisshines.com](mailto:schools@illinoisshines.com)



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# Additional Resources



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# Additional Financing Opportunities

To make projects more financially viable, schools can research and explore additional financing options and incentives, outside of Illinois Shines/the Illinois Power Agency



## Federal

- [IRA Direct Pay Tax Credits](#)
- [Renew America's Schools Grant](#) (U.S. Department of Energy)
- [Clean School Bus Program](#) (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
- [Climate Change Resources for Educators and Students](#) (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)



## State

- [ISBE School Construction Project Grants](#)
- [The Illinois Climate Bank](#)



## Other

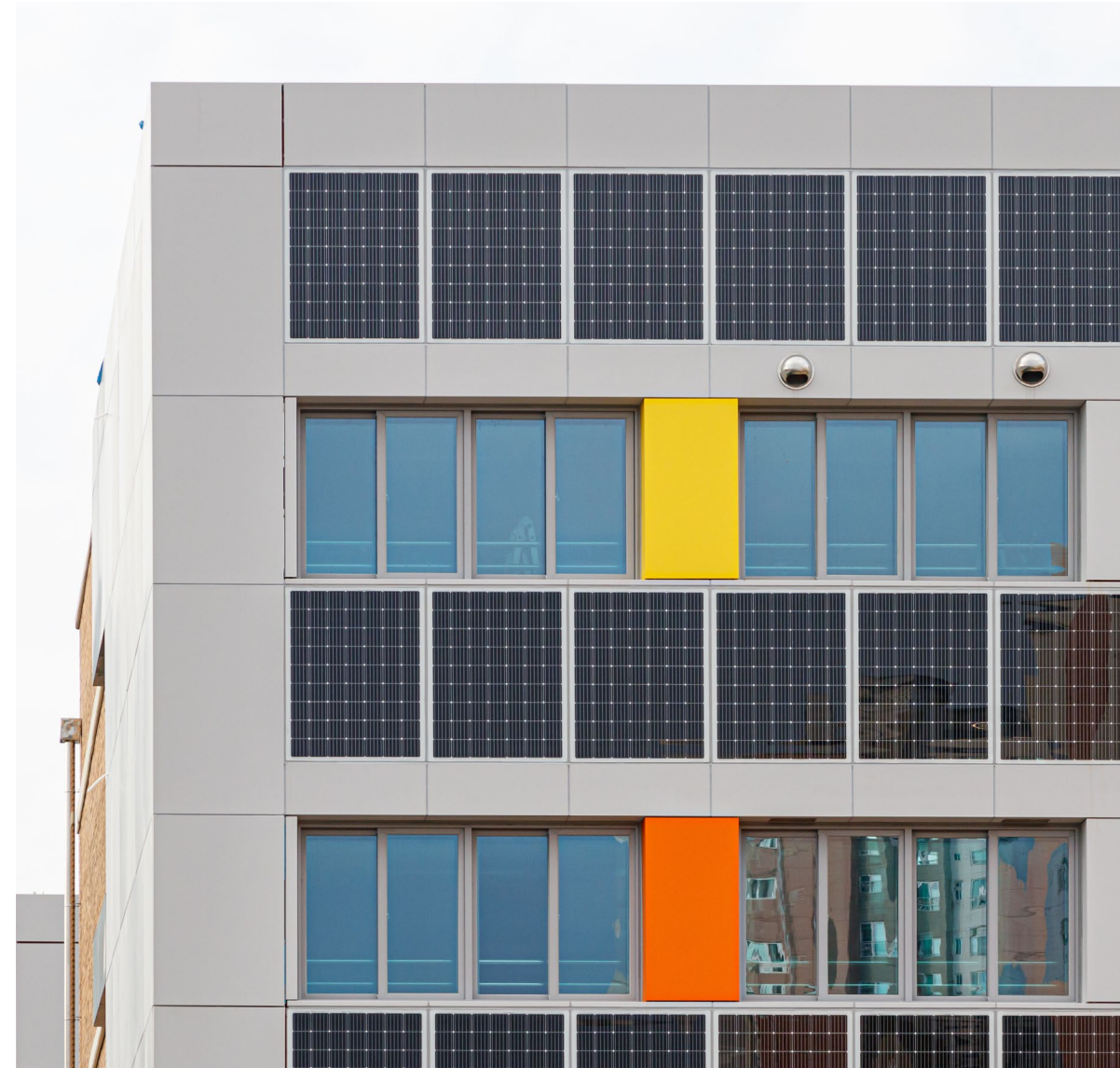
- [Ameren's Educational Facilities Incentives](#)
- [ComEd's Distributed Generation Rebates](#)

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# Resources

- [Public Schools Hub](#)
- [Public Schools Project Guide](#)
- [Illinois Shines Public School Category](#)
- [Other Funding Sources](#)
- [IPA's Power Hour: Clean Energy Future for Public Schools: Benefits and Challenges](#)
- [Public Schools Case Study](#)

These resources and more available at  
<https://illinoisshines.com/public-schools>



# Battery Storage

The Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act  
(CRGA)  
and Considerations for Schools

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# CONTEXT

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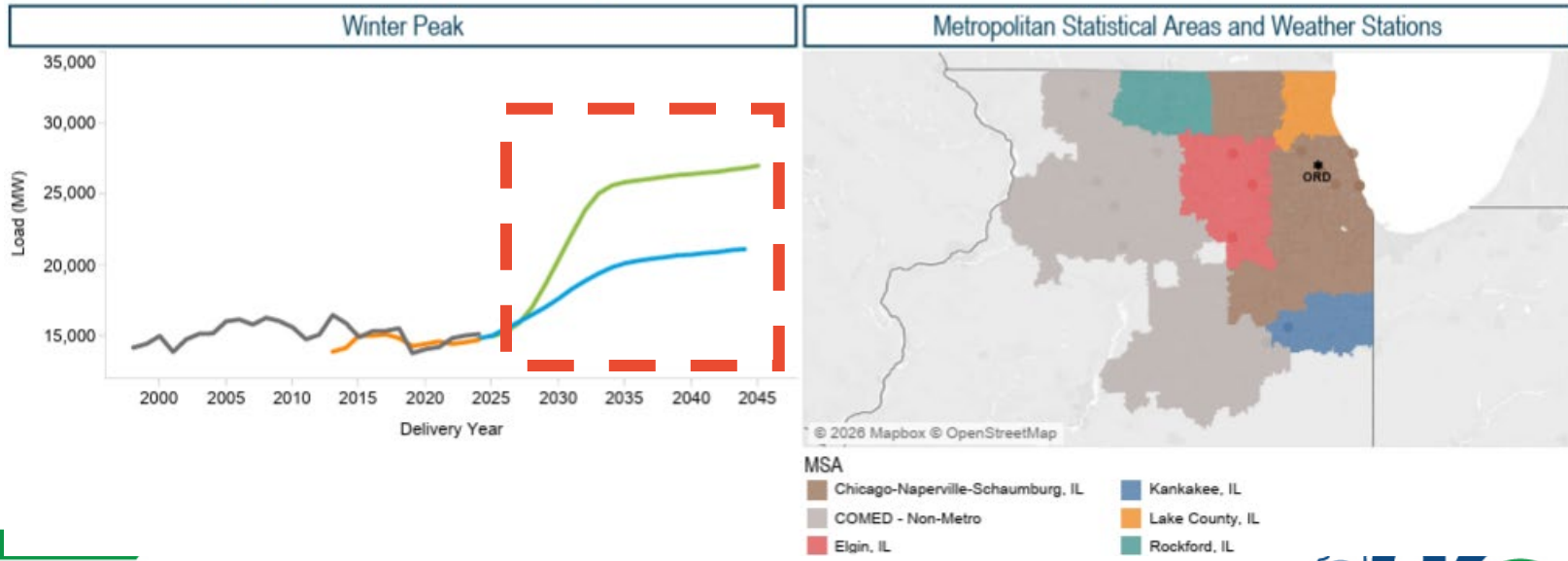
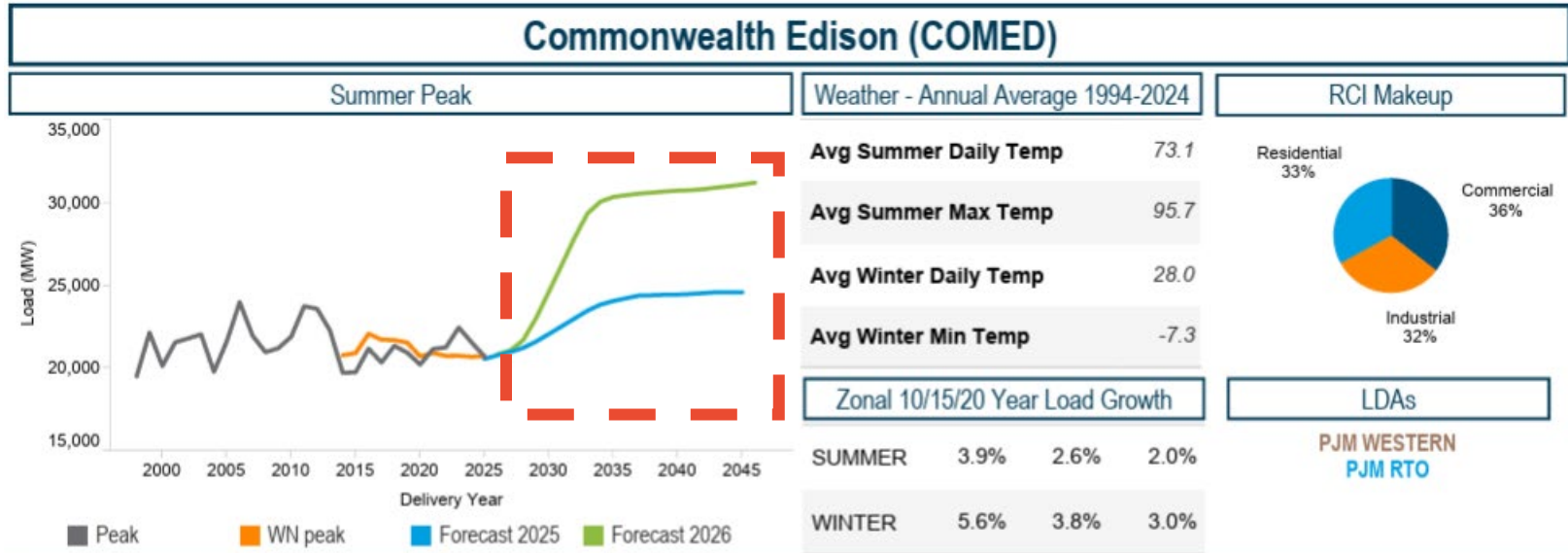
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## Context: Three Major Energy-Related Statutes in 10 years

Element	Future Energy Jobs Act (503 pages, 2016)	Climate & Equitable Jobs Act (956 pages, 2021)	Clean & Reliable Grid Affordability Act (1,021 pages, 2026)
Primary Goal	Accelerate renewable growth, preserve nuclear plants.	100% carbon-free power sector by 2045, equity-driven jobs.	Grid reliability, battery storage, and energy affordability.
Renewable / Clean Target	Maintained 25% RPS by 2025, carve outs (Adjustable Block, Solar for All, Brownfields, Community Solar)	40% by 2030; 50% by 2040; includes nuclear power to achieve 100% carbon free goal in 2050	Adds 3 GW storage; 6 GW wind; 4.8 GW solar by 2035. Inflation adjustment for RPS budget
Nuclear Power	Subsidies for Clinton and Quad Cities nuclear stations.	Subsidies to Dresden, Byron, and Braidwood nuclear stations.	Repeals the moratorium on new nuclear plant construction (over 300 MW).
Grid Management	Increased EE program funding, included EE program funding in utility ratebase	Ended formula rates; moved toward performance-based regulation; EV mandate	Creates Virtual Power Plants (VPPs) and Statewide Integrated Resource Planning (IRP).
Energy Storage	n/a	Encouraged storage study and pilot programs.	Mandates 3 GW of storage by 2030; creates "Storage for All" for low-income equity.
Equity & Workforce	Created the "Solar for All" program for low-income access.	Created Clean Jobs Workforce Hubs and "Displaced Energy Worker" programs.	Expands low-income efficiency spending; adds "Solar Bill of Rights" for muni/co-op customers.

# CONTEXT

Load Growth: Demand for electricity is growing for the first time in decades



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Monolith | The Power Bureau

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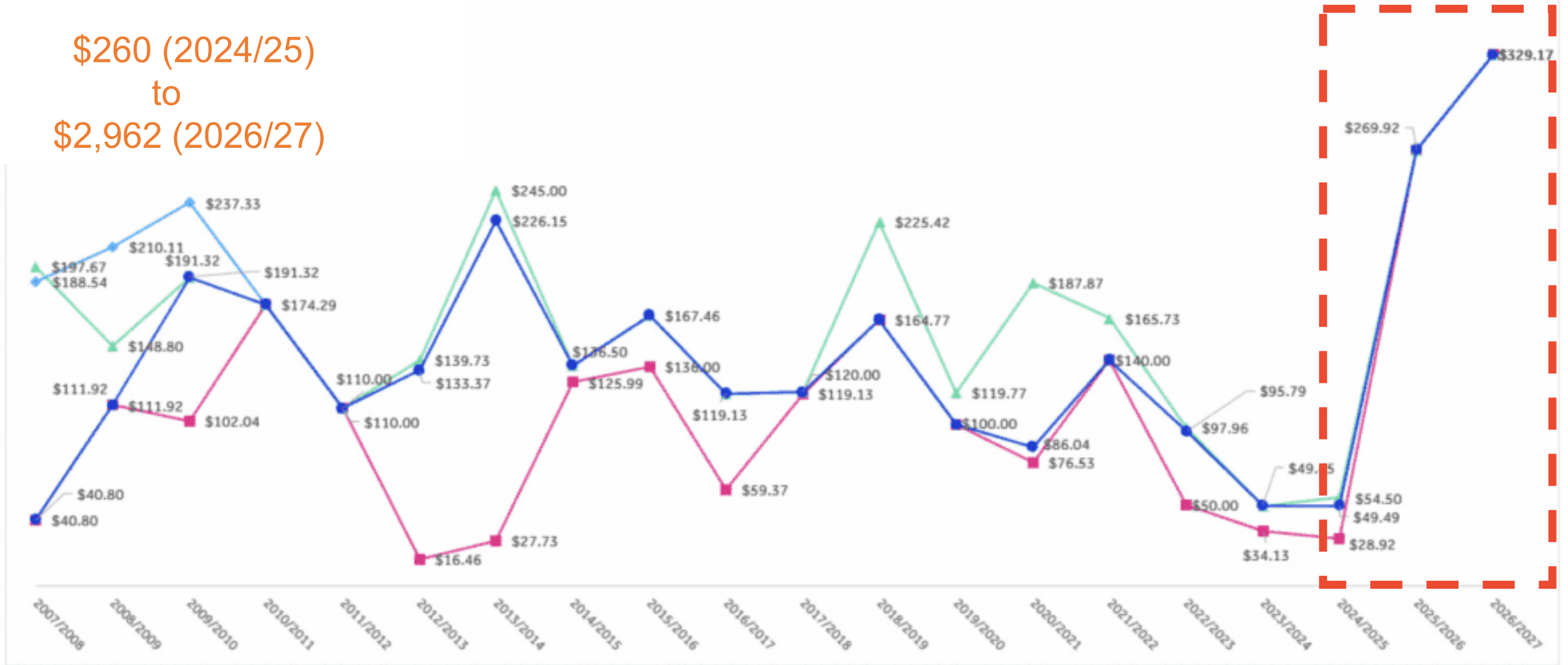
Capacity cost for a single-family home in ComEd will continue to rise:

\$260 (2024/25)  
to  
\$2,962 (2026/27)

Historical BRA clearing prices

■ RTO ▲ EMAAC ◆ SWMAAC ● MAAC

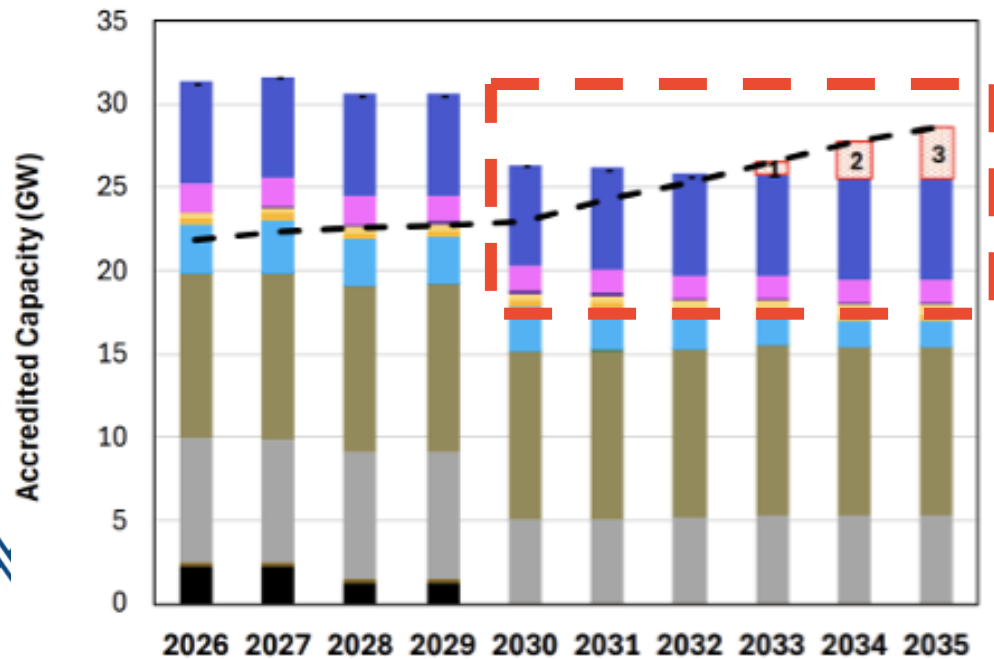
Source: PJM



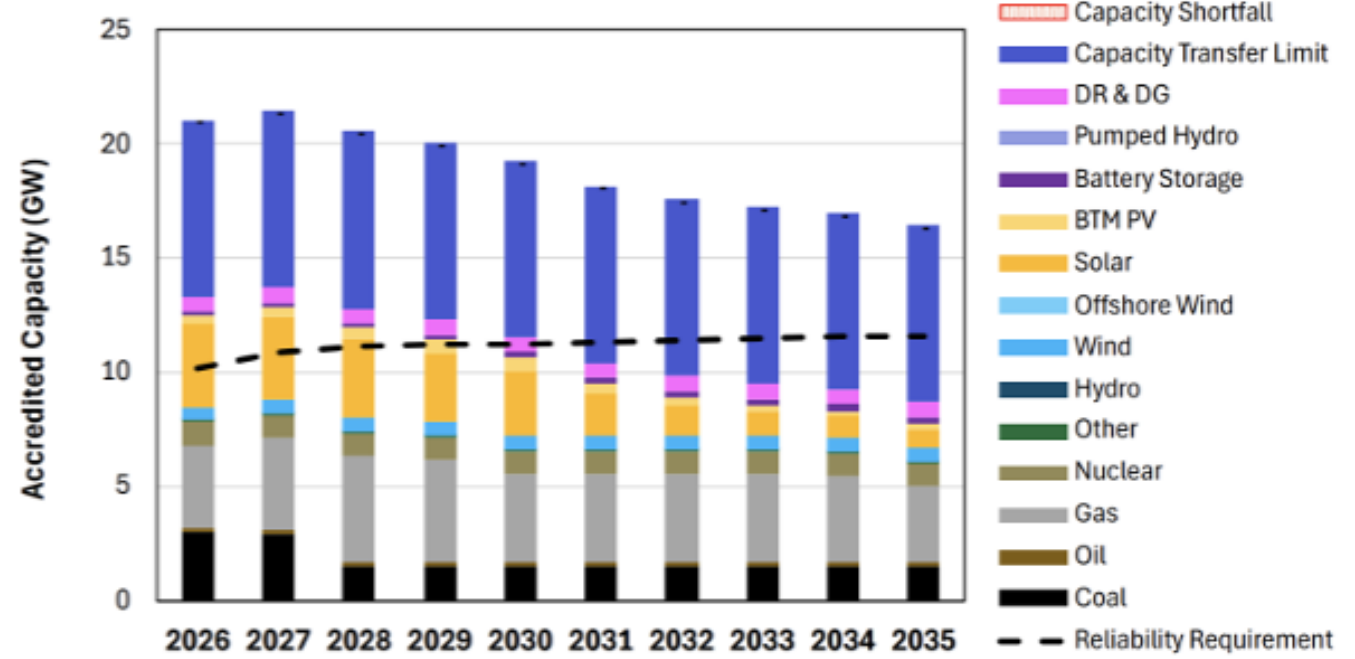
# Projected Shortfalls: PJM and MISO are short on capacity, so are ComEd and Ameren Illinois

Both Illinois zones are projected to rely on imported RA resources by 2030 (ComEd) and 2031 (MISO 4), but regional projections indicate that these resources may not be available from regional markets.

### PJM-ComEd Zone



### MISO LRZ 4



# CLEAN AND RELIABLE GRID AFFORDABILITY ACT (CRGA)

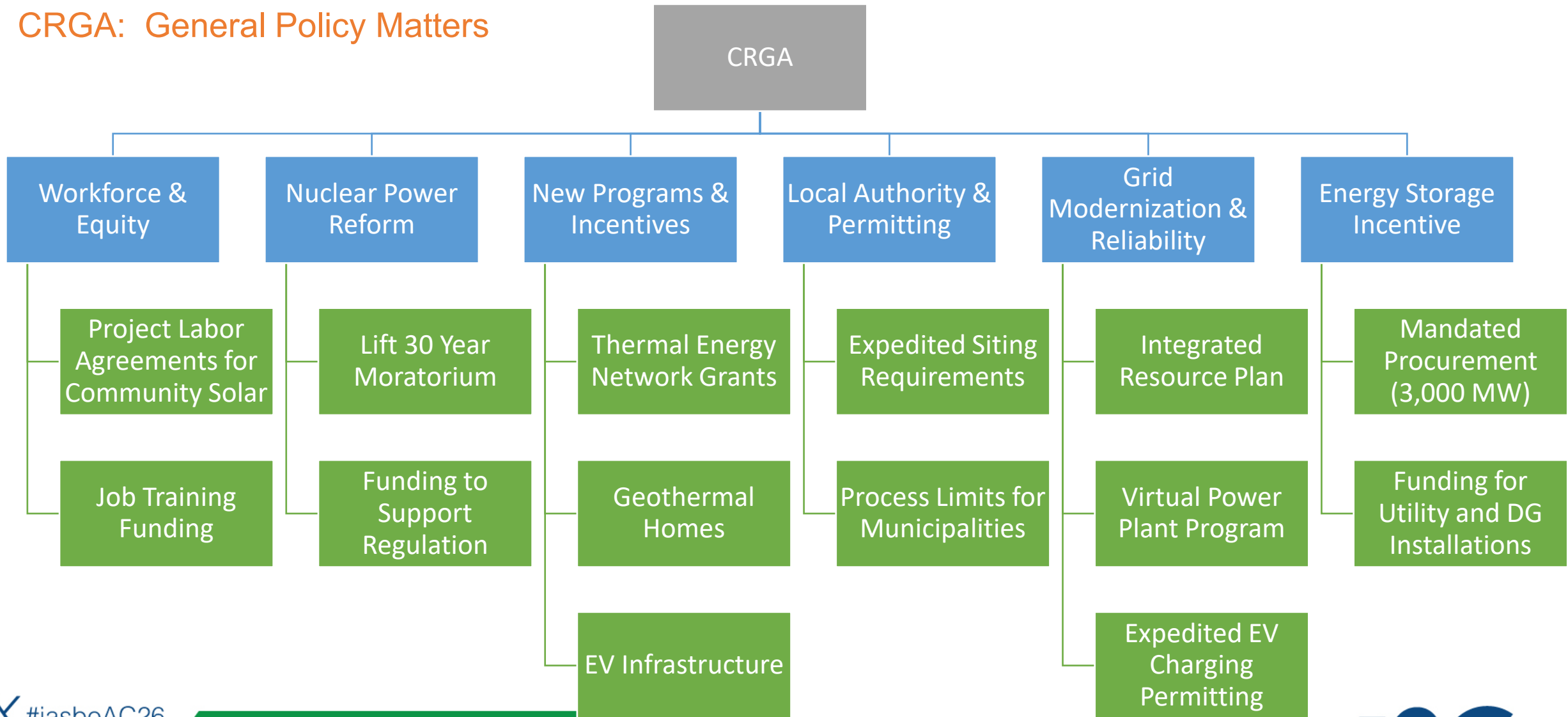
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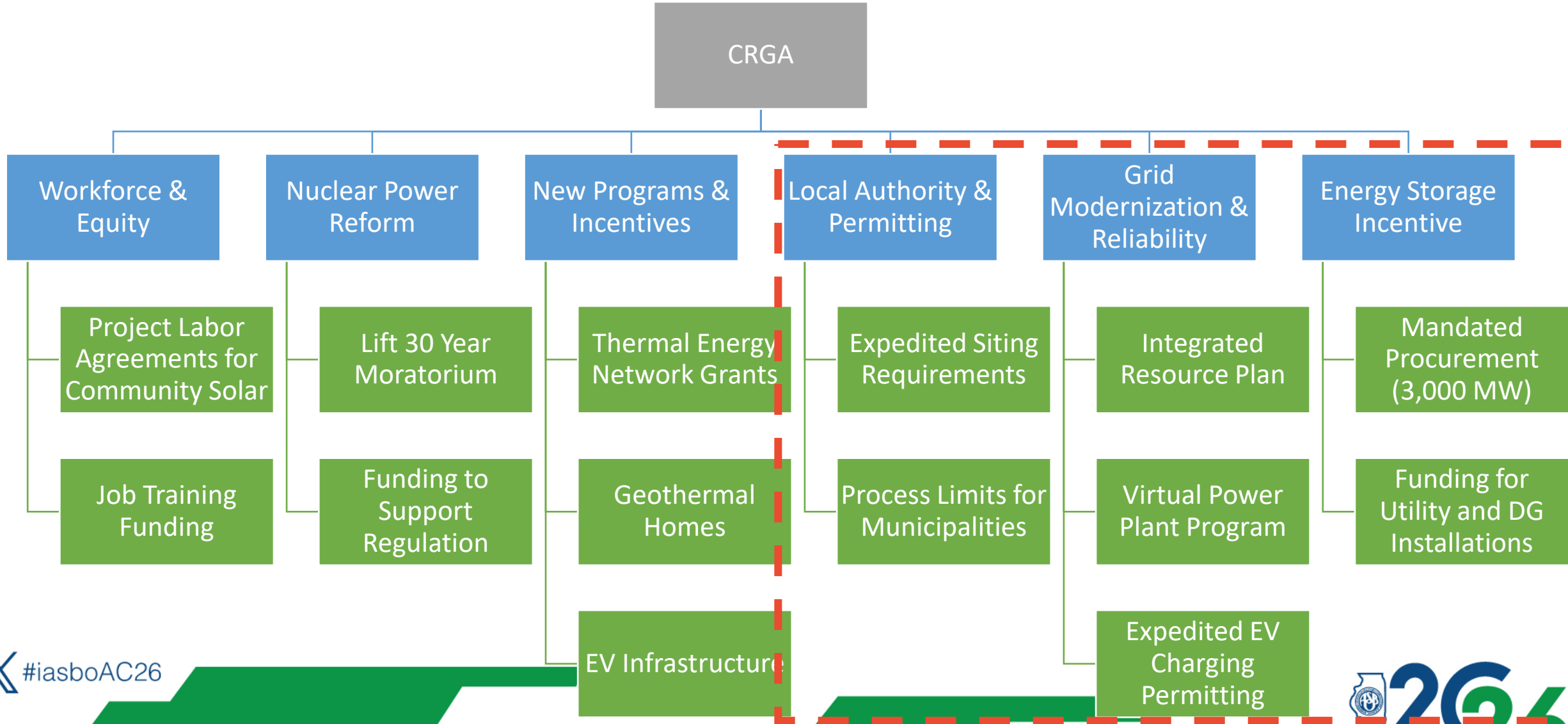
  
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# CRGA: General Policy Matters



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# CRGA: General Policy Matters



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## Major Takeaways

- **Increased demand decreases grid stability**
- **Unavoidable increases to demand rates**
- **Supply and Demand: result of higher prices**
  - Increase supply by adding capacity
  - Decrease demand by incentivizing

# SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSIDERATIONS

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# Efficiency

- **Reduce Consumption**
  - Net-metering
  - Load Shifting
  - Exporting energy
- **Peak Shaving**
  - Decrease demand charges by lowering peak usage
  - Negative PLC's & Supply Rates can generate credits
- **Batteries paired with solar can multiply the impact**

# Procurement

- **Direct Purchase**
  - Bonds & Grants
  - State & Federal Incentives
- **Power Purchase Agreements (PPA, VPPA)**
  - Reduce upfront investment
  - Secure future energy costs
- **Lease/Buyback Arrangements**
  - Hybrid Approach
  - Retain long-term ownership

# Monetization

- **Basic utility programs**
  - Demand Response
- **Additional revenue opportunities for advanced systems**
  - Real-time response
  - Frequency regulation
  - Market arbitrage
- **Virtual Power Plant**
  - Community Solar/DES
  - Leasing available space

# Monetization

- **Basic utility programs**
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**Don't forget  
about  
Electric Buses!**

# Major Takeaways

- **Demand & Supply Rates can be negative**
- **Battery incentives will help offset decreasing solar incentives**
- **Additional revenue opportunities for advanced systems**

# Questions and Answers

*We thank you for your time!*

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