

Putney Community Solar

While the vast majority of people are interested in taking advantage of solar energy only about 20 percent of people can. Most people face unworkable barriers like shady roofs, renting their homes or limited financial means to make the upfront investment that solar requires.



In response, more individuals and companies are figuring out ways to help solar-interested people overcome those barriers. In August 2013, partners in an exciting community solar project in Putney — the Clean Energy Collective, SunFarm Community Solar, Integrated Solar and Green Mountain Power as well as many new, happy solar-power owners — celebrated Vermont’s first community-owned solar facility. The 576-panel, 144 kW solar array, while based in Putney, serves 49 Green Mountain Power customers in nine counties. The project allows renters, people with poorly sighted properties and individuals of all income levels to go solar by buying into a community-scale project, which is sited on private property with stellar solar access.

How It Worked

The Clean Energy Collective, based in Colorado, has figured out a way to make it easy and possible for many individuals to invest in a shared solar project. (They’ve addressed some of the challenges regarding Securities and Exchange Commission rules around investors to make it easy and possible for many people to purchase clean, solar electricity.) In 2012, CEC made a connection with Nick Ziter, who found that his mother and other solar-interested friends and neighbors couldn’t go solar. So CEC and Ziter, head of SunFarm Solar, partnered and co-led this Putney effort. Later, they engaged Integrated Solar and the local utility — Green Mountain Power — to bring the array online.

Every “owner” in the project received all available rebates and tax incentives, as if the system were located on their roof. That’s because CEC is able to monetize the tax breaks and pass them along to the panel owners through a credit at purchase, giving panel purchasers a discount regardless of their tax status. Each “owner” is and will continue to be credited for the power their panels produce directly on their monthly GMP electric bills. Project customers were able to bypass the research, construction, maintenance and ongoing repair of building the system on their own by working with CEC, SunFarm and other project partners. Customers get to maximize the rewards of solar ownership, with the flexibility to have their bill credits move with them as long as they stay within GMP territory. They also have the ability to sell

their panels at any time.

People bought individual panels in the community array for \$813, depending on the power they needed to either fully offset their power requirements or meet a portion of their needs. The project was electrified in August 2013 and project developers and panel owners celebrated with an open house. Panel owners now see a power credit on their utility bill and no longer a monthly bill. While each panel is expected to pay for itself in about 12 years, owners will continue to receive power for 50 years or more.

Keys to Success:

- The project partners offered a 'turnkey' community ownership approach, addressing many of the often-complicated elements of going solar — incentives, billing, operations and maintenance etc — for the customer.
- This model leverages economies of scale.
- There was great symbiosis between partners in this project: Local leaders took the lead on finding a site and garnering public enthusiasm for purchasing panels in a project. The project developer managed many of the complicated elements regarding financing, insuring, maintaining and operating a system.

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