

Coyote Ridge Community Solar

In northern Chittenden County's rural community of Westford, a group net metered solar project was electrified in October 2013, bringing 17.5 kw of clean, sun-powered energy on to the grid to serve three different homes in this small development community (with the option future expansion to serve other homeowners as well). The 66-panel array is on land owned by one of the project partners. The other two members have not built their homes on site yet, but because of the way group net metering can work, the project provides power to their current homes in different towns for the time being.



"Our goal was to become independent from increased energy costs and do our part to generate renewable energy."

Bernhard Wunder, one of the project's organizers and solar off-takers

The solar array owners estimate that it will take about 12 years to recoup their upfront investment. After that, they look forward to free electricity for at least a decade or more. (Many solar systems are warranted for 25 years, and there are many examples of older, less advanced systems that have performed far longer than that.)

HOW IT WORKED

Three solar-interested homeowners coordinated on this project, in part, to save money and because none of their homes provided perfect conditions for individual roof mounted solar installations. The alternative — ground mounted systems — are typically more expensive. But the group found that a larger, shared, communally sited system would bring the costs down considerably. They established a Limited Liability Company (LLC) and put together a membership agreement to outline the legal structure of the group. They also worked out an operating manual that describes the division of costs and benefits, the allocation of power, how the billing will work etc.

They put many of the same pieces of the puzzle together that make it financially possible for people to go solar in Vermont. Each homeowner was able to capture the 30 percent federal Investment Tax Credit for solar and they secured the state's Small Scale Renewable Energy Incentive at the rate available at that time — \$.40 cent per kWh. These two financial incentives, coupled with Green Mountain Power's \$0.06 per kWh additional incentive, helped to drive down the cost of the project sufficiently to allow the three homeowners to affordably finance or purchase the remaining payment for their portion of the solar system.

KEYS TO SUCCESS?

- A landowner/project partner — Eva Paquin — who was willing to utilize a southern facing portion of their property to host the solar array.
- Dedicated individuals who shared a vision, worked well together and diligently ran the numbers, broke down the barriers and enlisted the legal and technical help needed.
- The federal and state incentives, which made the project affordable for all.

CONTACT

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