

# Community Solar Forum

Grand Rapids Public Utility Commission – 10/09/2018



On October 9th 2018, 40 community members came together to learn about a proposed community solar garden in the Grand Rapids Public Utilities territory. Participants heard from speakers as they described the proposed project's impacts on the utility, the community-driven process, and the specifics about project's anticipated benefits, costs, and construction. Following the presentation, attendees participated in a facilitated discussion, identifying key information about the proposal and the possible opportunities and concerns associated with the project's implementation.

## Opportunities:

### Cost/Financing

- We could effectively time this project to realize the tax benefits.
- Participation would reduce wholesale peak demand costs to the utility.
- Subscribers would have access to a lower long-term electricity rates.

### Energy Sources

- This project could open the door for more renewables — people who want biomass energy may see the move to local energy as a step in their direction.
- We could take advantage of the battery technology which is advancing so that storage is more affordable and practical.
- This would be a great opportunity to help reduce greenhouse gases and to produce cleaner energy that is renewable and sustainable.

### Community engagement

- We could work together as a community on a clean energy issue and help save the world.\*
- Our community would be a leader in a project that could be a source of pride.
- We would have a variety of options to educate the community about the project, including through utility bills, social media, community gathering places, and the use of good visuals to express key information.
- A community solar garden could serve as a teaching aid for the community.
- We can approach the younger people in our community—the ones who will be around to see the advancements that solar energy has to offer. If I can make the world a better place by giving up a cup of coffee once a month, I'm going to do it without a doubt.



## Key information GRPUC customers should know about the proposal:

- The program is voluntary, and non-participants won't be paying for the program.\*\*\*
- Energy prices are largely based on peak demand, which solar+battery can help to level out, saving the entire community money.\*\*
- Solar+storage can generate savings for subscribers over time (10-15 years).
- The Community Solar Garden Proposal is a community-driven effort.
- Our community can do this project -- it is realistic and Minnesota is already a leader in this field.

## Concerns:

### Siting/construction

- We would have to be sure we get experienced people to design the project, and hire locals to assist in construction.\*
- Siting of the community solar garden impacts the project's visibility, community pride, and community support.

### Cost/financing

- We would have to be sure we can sell enough subscriptions.\*
- If the PUC does not acquire the solar array then they would never realize the free energy after the initial costs are paid off.

## Event Speakers

- Julie Kennedy, General Manager at Grand Rapids Public Utilities
- Bill Schnell, Itasca Clean Energy Team
- Jill Cliburn, President at Cliburn & Associates, LLC

### Community engagement

- The presentation of the project to the public would need to be clear, engaging, relevant, and settled on the details so that people do not get confused or uncertain about how the project and financing would work.\*
- There may be pushback from politically-motivated nay-sayers which we would need to confront if we moved forward.\*
- The project would need a good communications plan to keep the community informed.
- We would need to increase publicity so the greater community is aware and (hopefully) on board.

\* Two similar small group statements were combined

\*\* Three similar small group statements were combined

\*\*\* Four similar small group statements were combined

