SUPPORT HB9 & SB143 - COMMUNITY SOLAR ACT

Sponsors: Speaker of House Brian Egolf, Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero, Rep. Andrea Romero, and Sen. Liz Stefanics

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SOLAR? Local community solar allows multiple participants to share the cost-saving benefits of a single large-scale solar array. It is a simple tool that provides everyone, regardless of income or property ownership, the opportunity to choose local, reliable, and cost-effective clean energy. 19 states have already passed laws enabling community solar programs.

Community members - individuals and businesses - are able to purchase a subscription for solar energy from a community solar facility. The energy produced is then credited to the subscriber's electricity bill. They receive a bill credit for the energy produced by their solar subscription.

ACCESSIBILITY & AFFORDABILITY: Community Solar is a great option for renters or homeowners who are unable to install solar panels on their roofs. Community Solar is affordable and a hedge against continually rising utility rates.

The Community Solar Act will help lower and stabilize electricity bills through affordable solar energy while breaking open a renewable energy economy that creates family-supporting jobs.

HOW WILL COMMUNITY SOLAR WORK IN NEW MEXICO?

With this law, Native American tribes and organizations, municipalities, counties, for-profit and nonprofit entities, including, importantly, low-income service organizations, will be authorized to transact business in New Mexico to construct, own and operate community solar generation facilities, or contract with others to do so.

The utility companies will distribute the electricity produced by the community solar facilities. Utility companies will use and maintain their grid systems to transfer the electricity produced by solar energy to our homes and business. Businesses, non-profit organizations (especially low-income housing providers or other low-income advocacy organizations), and pueblos, tribes, and other sovereign nations can be the subscriber organizations.

Individuals and organizations can subscribe to a community solar facility, leveraging up to 120% of their average annual electric power consumption, and will get a bill credit for their solar energy subscription.

The Public Regulation Commission will adopt regulations implementing the Community Solar Act by November 1, 2020, and establish a voluntary option of accessing solar energy by a community solar facility through a subscription process in accordance with standard rules.

The Public Regulation Commission will develop uniformity of standards, appropriate, but not oppressive regulations and more.

Additionally, and importantly, Energy Minerals Natural Resource Dept. (EMNRD) will evaluate the community solar program in accordance with the Act through 2023: determine if there has been sufficient low-income access; gauge geographic diversity of projects across both urban and rural areas of the state; evaluate if there has been reasonable and timely interconnection with the utility's grid; and generally evaluate the effectiveness of the Community Solar program.
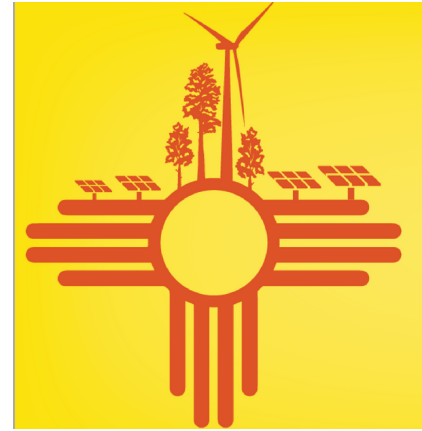
SICK & TIRED OF RISING ELECTRIC RATES?

PASS AFFORDABLE SOLAR FOR ALL!

WE WILL GENERATE MORE SOLAR POWER IN NM WITH COMMUNITY SOLAR.

MUNICIPALITIES, SOVEREIGN NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES WILL BE ABLE TO PRODUCE SOLAR ENERGY THAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS, INCLUDING RENTERS, CAN BUY-INTO.

UNDER CURRENT LAW, THE UTILITY COMPANIES (PNM, EPE AND SPS) CONTROL THE SOLAR MARKET, AND IT IS ILLEGAL FOR A CITY, COUNTY OR TRIBE TO SET UP SOLAR FACILITIES WITHOUT THE UTILITY COMPANIES APPROVAL.

STEP 1: A community solar project generates clean solar energy

STEP 2: Individuals, local businesses, schools, and others sign up to receive energy from a community solar facility.

STEP 3: Community Solar subscribers receive a credit on their bill based on the amount of energy produced by their community solar subscription.

STEP 4: Signing up for community solar should provide tangible economic benefits and savings on your utility bill

BILL SAVINGS $$

* Solar energy is now one of the lowest-cost energy solutions on the market
* 84% of New Mexicans want solar.
* New Mexico is 2nd in the nation for solar capacity.
* *The maximum capacity of each community solar garden will be 5 MW at a single location, requiring a footprint of approximately 20 acres of land.*

SOME FACTOIDS:

• The $10 million community assistance fund will be established to facilitate low-income customer subscriptions to community solar facilities – a FANTASTIC way to ensure equity in this new program!

• There will be a new job at the PRC for a qualified person to carry out the purposes of the community solar assistance fund and administer and develop the community solar program, and it will be funded.

• There is a limit on each community solar projects to 5 megawatts (MW).

• A customer who already has solar on her house may subscribe to a community solar facility.

• There is a 200 MW cap through 2023. Meaning that customers, sovereign nations and businesses can only install about 60-65 MWs per year – 30% must be low-income!

• A monopoly utility (PNM, EPE, SPS) can own or operate a community solar facility but is limited to 10% of the total program subscription. (We'd rather this wasn't so, because the Investor-Owned-Utilities, literally I-O-U, will take advantage of their monopoly status and use their competitive advantage to access the easiest customers at the best locations, but we'll accept this corporate benefit to pass the law for the greater good it will provide. We understand that this is antithetical to energy democracy: local control for community empowerment, but we will make this compromise.)

• Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) will be owned by the subscriber organization and can be used by the subscriber organization to lower the cost of the solar for subscribers AND, if competitively purchased, benefit the monopoly utility to meet the state's renewable portfolio standard, hence lower the cost of renewable energy compliance for all customers.

• Within 6 months of the Commission's rules (required by 11/1/2020) the monopoly utilities shall begin crediting subscriber organizations and their respective subscribers with credits for solar energy produced on their electric bills – YEAH!

• On an annual basis every monopoly utility must file a report with details about the number of participating low-income customers, the total number of facilities, total program capacity of Indian nations, and more.

• A rural electric cooperative may request an exemption from the Community Solar Act requirements (for a period of 3 years) by requesting a waiver, but thereafter must comply.

• Wonky, but important stuff: every IOU must include total community solar subscriber contribution to its "load & resource tables." This means that the utility must account for total community solar subscriber generation and subtract this output as part of its total required customer demand/need: local control matters.

Learn more: NewEnergyEconomy.org