



Carroll County Environmental Advisory Council

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Community Solar Scope

What is community solar?

Broadly speaking, a community solar project is a solar power generating station whose electricity is shared by more than one household or customer. "Community solar" can refer to both 'community-owned' projects as well as third party-owned plants whose electricity is shared by a community... The primary purpose of community solar is to allow members of a community the opportunity to share the benefits of solar power even if they cannot or prefer not to install solar panels on their property. Project participants benefit from the electricity generated by the community solar farm, which costs less than the price they would ordinarily pay to their utility... Community solar allows people to go solar even if they do not own property on which to put their own system." (Energy Sage, <https://www.energysage.com/solar/community-solar/community-solar-power-explained/>, Oct 30 2017).



In Maryland, State law (SB 398/HB 1087, 2015) defines a community solar energy generating systems (CSEGS), or "community solar" for short, as a solar energy system that:

- Is connected to the electric distribution grid serving the state;
- Is located in the same electric service territory as its subscribers;
- Is attached to the electric meter of a subscriber or is a separate facility with its own electric meter;
- Credits its generated electricity, or the value of its generated electricity, to the bills of the subscribers to that system through virtual net energy metering;
- Has at least two subscribers;
- Does not have subscriptions larger than 200 kilowatts constituting more than 60 percent of its subscriptions;
- Has a generating capacity that does not exceed 2 megawatts as measured by the alternating current rating of the system's inverter; and
- May be owned by any person.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (<https://energy.gov/eere/sunshot/community-and-shared-solar>), "Community solar business models increase deployment of solar technology in communities, making it possible for people to invest in solar together. Shared solar falls under the community solar umbrella, allowing multiple participants [to] benefit directly from the energy produced by one solar array. Shared solar participants typically benefit by owning or leasing a portion of a system, or by purchasing kilowatt-hour blocks of renewable energy generation."

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Maryland Legislation & Regulations

The Maryland General Assembly passed legislation in 2015 to allow community solar projects. Implementing regulations were subsequently adopted and final in July 2016. The Maryland Public Service Commission has set up a three-year pilot program to allow subscriber organizations, which own and/or operate the CSEGSs, to apply and implement a program. CSEGSs are limited to 2 MW of electrical output.

The Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) approved regulations to establish a community solar pilot program in Maryland on June 15, 2016. The regulations went into effect on July 18, 2016.

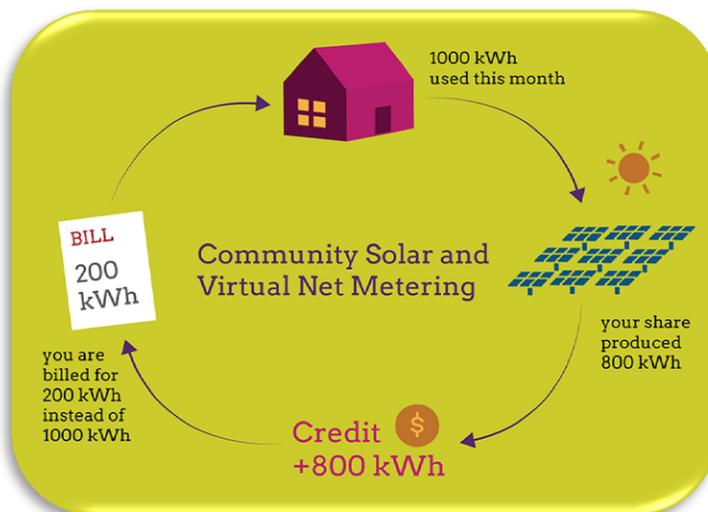
Maryland Community Solar Pilot Program

According to the PSC, the “community solar pilot program will:

- Provide access to solar-generated electricity – in a manner similar to rooftop solar and net metering – for all Maryland customers without requiring property ownership;
- Incentivize solar companies to provide service to low- and moderate-income customers;
- Set aside program capacity for each area of the state with a statewide cap at about 193 MW. About 60 MW is set aside for projects focused on low and moderate income customers;
- Attract new investment in Maryland’s renewable infrastructure and green economy;
- Allow renters to contract for solar energy with the same benefits as rooftop owners;
- Create separate program capacity for small systems and systems built on brownfields, parking lots, or industrial areas;
- Allow smaller and rural service territories to make use of existing solar facilities while encouraging construction of new systems in the urban and suburban areas of Maryland;
- Include significant consumer protections, including prohibition against unreasonable fees and clear contract disclosure requirements; and
- Allow the Commission Staff to collect necessary data to study the impact on Maryland’s electricity grid over the three-year pilot program.

Individual community solar projects will be operated by subscriber organizations (which can include utilities, retail electricity suppliers, solar developers, etc.) that are approved by the Public Service Commission and the electric company serving the location of each project.”

(<http://www.psc.state.md.us/electricity/community-solar-pilot-program/>, Dec. 2017).



<https://www.energysage.com/solar/community-solar/pricing-models/>

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Carroll County

In Carroll County, solar facilities are allowed as an accessory use in any zone. Solar facilities other than accessory are currently only allowed in the Business and Industrial zoning districts, although ground-mounted systems are not permitted in the Business Neighborhood Retail zone. No size limit is imposed for ground-mounted systems in the other Business and Industrial zones.

Overall Task:

The EAC will research CSEGSs to determine:

- ☀️ Pros and cons to Carroll County residents and businesses of potentially allowing these facilities in zoning districts other than the Business and Industrial zoning districts,
- ☀️ Pros and cons to Carroll County Government of potentially allowing these facilities in zoning districts other than the Business and Industrial zoning districts,
- ☀️ Options that will be available to Carroll County customers,
- ☀️ Average cost and cost savings, if information is available, and
- ☀️ Broad recommended framework for amending zoning code to allow community solar in Carroll County. (The EAC will not be making recommendations for specific language for a zoning text amendment at this point, just general concepts to consider).

Work Product:

A report with findings and general recommendations on potential steps to move forward, if applicable, will be prepared by the EAC and presented to the Board.

Timeline:

Completion anticipated in end of August 2018.