

Ashfield Solar Planning Next Steps

The Ashfield Solar Action Plan is now available for public review at the library, town hall, and on the town website. The Ashfield Energy Committee has reviewed the document and has been meeting with town boards and committees to go over the findings and make our recommendations for next steps. This month's Energy Committee column will review those recommendations and highlight ways residents can get involved in moving this process forward.

The Solar Action Plan prepared by Umass Clean Energy Extension staff and student Grace Theberge was based on both a technical assessment of what solar is possible in Ashfield as well as the community solar survey assessing residents' preferences re solar development. Residents were in favor of installing enough solar to meet Ashfield community needs. Community self-sufficiency might ultimately require 15 MW of solar development in Ashfield, which represents approximately 12 times the current amount of solar installed. The Solar Action Plan outlines a number of ways Ashfield can work to achieve self-sufficiency: residential solar, municipal solar, solar for businesses and institutions, on farm solar, and large ground mounted solar on private land.

The Energy Committee is recommending that the town start now with 2 primary areas of focus: 1) another residential "Solarize" campaign similar to what the town did in 2016 and 2) installation of solar for municipal buildings and properties. The solar survey showed these to be the most strongly supported by town residents and an obvious place to start.

The residential solar campaign would build on our experience in 2016, when the town chose a contractor and residents signed up and received a discount because we were bringing multiple households to the contractor all at once. This benefited residents installing solar because they both got a discount and had a simpler process not having to vet multiple contractors themselves. We would like feedback from people who participated in the 2016 Solarize campaign- what went well, what didn't. Now in 2023 we have the benefit of our own experience as well as evidence based research by the Yale Center for Business and the Environment which has studied a successful statewide Solarize program in CT which helped increase homes with solar in the state from 800 to 12,500 over the course of 3 years.

The municipal solar campaign would use information from the Solar Action Plan to look at potential for solar at Town Hall, the wastewater treatment plant, the firestation, Sanderson Academy, the town garage, the library, and the transfer station and identify which of these properties makes sense to start with. This group might also look at ways to incorporate battery storage for resiliency such as at the firestation, Town Hall, or Sanderson Academy to provide some power for critical operations if the grid went down for an extended period of time.

Both of these campaigns will be large undertakings and more than the 4 member Energy Committee can reasonably take on. We are looking to form working groups made up of an Energy Committee member and volunteers (you!) working with support from Umass Clean Energy Extension, relevant town boards and FRCOG (Franklin Regional Council of Governments). Please consider joining one of these working groups. You do not need expertise in the technical aspects- just a desire to help. All of what you need to know can be learned as we go. This is a chance to speed up the adoption of solar which is essential in the fight against climate change. The more solar we can get on rooftops the less we will need to put on farm or forest land which we all treasure and want to protect.

The Energy Committee will be hosting a public forum On Monday November 6, 7pm at town hall for residents to discuss the Solar Action Plan, bring up any questions and concerns, and sign up for one of

the working groups. Zara Dowling from Umass Clean Energy Extension will be present to help answer questions. We want to know what you think! Please come and in the meantime contact us at energy@Ashfield.org with any questions or if you are considering volunteering.