

Energy Committee Column
Ashfield News
October 2022

Focus on solar continues this month with 2 exciting pieces of news: 1) The MTRSD School Committee voted unanimously 9/14/2022 to move forward with a solar installation on the MTRS roof and 2) the Selectboard approved a year long collaboration between the Ashfield Energy Committee and the UMASS Clean Energy Extension (CEE) to conduct a solar planning process for the town..

Mohawk Solar Installation

The MTRSD School committee voted unanimously 9/14/2022 to sign a Letter of Intent (LOI) with Solect to put a solar installation on the MTRSD roof. Once the LOI is signed, Solect will apply with the utility, which can take 2 months, and conduct a full structural engineering assessment to allow them to develop terms for a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) contract. If all goes well the PPA contract would be negotiated and signed winter-spring, with construction likely summer 2023 and permission to operate fall 2023.

Solar Planning with UMASS Clean Energy Extension

Late August the Selectboard gave permission for the Ashfield Energy Committee to move ahead with a collaboration with the UMASS Clean Energy Extension. UMASS CEE will assign 1-3 students to Ashfield to develop a solar plan for the town. This will be done in several phases. Already the CEE has been provided access to relevant documents to give them appropriate background information: maps, zoning and solar bylaws, etc. Students will be reviewing these documents and will begin checking in weekly with a representative from the Energy Committee. They will first work on a Solar Resource and Infrastructure Assessment focused on technical feasibility: how much power could we produce in Ashfield if we maximized solar on town buildings and land as well as privately owned properties? The next step will be a community solar survey in which town residents will be asked how, where, and to what extent we would like to see solar development occur. These first 2 pieces of work will inform the final Community Solar Action Plan in which the CEE students will discuss feasible areas of solar development desired by residents and possible next steps towards pursuing municipal projects, encouraging development on locations preferred by the community, and any recommended bylaw or permitting updates. All of this will be at no cost to Ashfield and no obligation to complete the action steps identified. This will be an exciting complement to the solar bylaw, which places limits on larger scale solar to protect the character of the town. This process will focus on where we do want solar to decrease our town's carbon footprint and increase resiliency, sustainability, and energy independence.

More information about CEE and the solar planning process can be found at:
ag.umass.edu/solarplanning

As always the Ashfield Energy Committee welcomes community members to attend our meetings which are posted on the town website and generally held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 4pm. The October meeting will be Tuesday October 18th at 4pm. Any question, concerns, thoughts or if you are interested in being part of the solar planning process feel free to contact us at energy@ashfield.org.