

I am absolutely convinced that increasing community solar is not only necessary, but is the key component to a sustainable and resilient energy future for Vermont, and it will help grow our economy to boot. The recent report on clean energy jobs shows that Solar is one of the fastest growing job markets, and this is an industry that keeps energy dollars in state, helping our local economy profit, instead of sending our money to out of state and foreign corporations.

Community solar will reduce emissions, stabilize energy costs, and increase the resiliency of our grid. It will also give Vermonters an ownership stake in our energy infrastructure, and will diversify our energy portfolio.

Beyond the obvious and direct carbon reductions we get from producing energy from the sun rather than burning dirty fuels, community solar partners well with other technologies such as electric vehicle charging and air-heat pumps, which can both dramatically reduce or eliminate carbon emissions from two of our biggest sources: transportation and heat. Through Net Metering, the solar panels on one house or one CSA can benefit the entire community, and reduce emissions further.

Community Solar has a fixed cost after installation. Prices do not go up and down with the market, fuel prices, or at the whim of foreign corporations. Once installed, solar panels tend to give reliable service for years, with little to no repair. Having a fixed cost allows families and communities to plan for the future, and will save more and more money over time, as fuel and wholesale electrical prices increase.

Vermont's energy future is dependent on many outside forces we have no control over. Most of our electricity comes from foreign corporations. This near foreign monopoly puts us in a similar predicament to what our nation faced with OPEC in the 1970s. It is not inconceivable that we could face environmental, economic or political realities that would significantly increase costs or make our now plentiful Canadian hydroelectric unavailable. Solar diversifies our energy portfolio to insure we don't have all our energy eggs in one basket.

An increasingly extreme climate puts us all at risk. I think of Irene, and the community of Rochester, which was cut off from the world and left without power. People had to cross the mountains by horse to bring in food and medicine. A community solar array could have provided basic electrical needs to the town.

Community solar gives people an ownership stake in our grid, and their own energy future. Since it benefits the local community, it insures that it has the support of the people. Unlike industrial scale development, where big corporations can come in and force people to give up their rights, and impose gag orders to ramrod their projects through, Community solar needs to start with strong grass roots: These projects can ONLY happen when folks come together to make them grow.

Solar is also flexible, and could utilize brownfields, parking lots, rooftops, stock yards, landfills, abandoned quarries and other impacted locations. It can be scaled to fit any need, from an outhouse nightlight, to entire cities, and with proper community oversight, can be a positive addition to the landscape for years to come, without impacting fragile ecosystems, choking watersheds, or interrupting wildlife corridors, unlike other resources which are site specific.

For these reasons it is imperative that we prioritize community solar in Vermont, and find ways to increase incentives, and reduce the impediments to these vital community projects.