

Policy Adoption Fact Sheet: Community Solar Array

2020 Comprehensive Plan Review | David Chernack, Joint Environmental Committee Intern

Why is this action important? A huge portion of Rhinebeck’s greenhouse gas emissions stem from its demand for electricity, which comes from a mix of nuclear, hydropower, and natural gas power plants. Solar energy is one critical way in which Rhinebeck can reduce its community carbon footprint.

CSA refers to community solar arrays, shared by multiple community stakeholders, such as the local municipal government and residents. Subscribers and panel owners receive credit on their electricity bills for their share of the power produced by those solar arrays. Building a community solar array in either the Village or Town of Rhinebeck would be a big step to reducing Rhinebeck’s climate impacts and bring more renewable energy to its residents, particularly those whose private properties don’t lend themselves to on-site solar.

How is this action implemented? In order to construct a community solar array, the Town or Village Board would need to find a suitable site to construct the installation given zoning constraints, public comments, and viewshed issues. Following this, the Town or Village would contract with a solar installer to build the solar array, and ideally, plant the area surrounding the array with pollinator-friendly habitat.

The Town has already researched locations for siting a CSA—including the capped Town landfill, which is unfortunately too far from a power hookup—and the Village has already adopted the unified solar permit required to pursue this action.

What does the Comprehensive Plan say about it? The Town’s 2009 Comprehensive Plan stipulates that the Town should work to reduce its energy use, but does not mention solar power explicitly.

What departments will it involve? The Town and Village Boards, the Joint Environmental Committee, the Town and Village Planning Boards, and the Town and Village Zoning Boards would all be involved.

What will it cost? The head-to-tail cost of installing a solar array is relatively high; however, its savings are distributed across the community who buy-in. Additionally, modern solar panels last up to 25 years, and maintenance costs are low.



Community solar array quick facts:

CSC points: 9-16 points (PE4 Action: Solar Energy Installation and PE6 Action: Unified Solar Permit) depending on number of arrays

Benefits to Rhinebeck: reduction in the community’s carbon footprint, more energy diversity, energy savings for residents

Cost: medium to high

Relevant agencies: Village/Town Boards, Joint Environmental Committee