

# a SOLAR GARDEN IN PUTNEY, VERMONT

By George Harvey

The Putney Community Solar Array, being built in Putney, will be Vermont's first community-owned solar garden. It is a collaborative effort between SunFarm Community Solar, a Putney based solar organizer, the Clean Energy Collective, which handles financing, permitting, and legal matters, and Integrated Solar, a Brattleboro based firm tasked with array construction. The project will have a capacity of 147 kW, and includes 588 photovoltaic panels.

The Putney solar garden allows individuals, businesses, and non-profits to buy panels in the array and receive all the same benefits as those with individual systems. Those who find this implies too much upfront investment will be able to apply for financing through the Vermont State Employees' Credit Union. Ownership is available to those Vermont residents who had been customers of Green Mountain Power before the merger with CVPS. For those who are former CVPS customers, SunFarm and the Clean Energy collective have plans in the near future for another array that would allow panel ownership for those customers.

Nick Ziter, the founder of SunFarm Community Solar, pointed out to me one of the many advantages of ownership of panels in the solar garden. The solar garden is an independent LLC, with all funds to service the array held in that LLC, and set up to keep the array active



for 50 years. While people buying panels actually own them, just as they would own panels on their own property,

maintenance and insurance are provided by the funds held by the LLC.

The people buying the panels need

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not be property owners. This gives apartment dwellers a chance to own solar panels. Because the credit produced is not tied to a specific location, it gives people who are likely to move the same advantage. Many people live in places where there is not enough sunshine for solar, such as the north sides of mountains, but the community solar garden gives them a chance to own solar panels that are well sited. Those who own property do not have to consider how best to site panels it. Clearly, it gives many of us an opportunity we otherwise would not have.

The solar garden also provides financial and other advantages that people with their own arrays would miss. Since there are nearly six hundred panels being installed, they can be purchased and placed at low cost. This, coupled with optimal site placement, allows the returns to often be much better than they would be for people who site panels at their own homes. The tax credits and incentives available to solar are taken upfront, allowing those without a tax appetite to receive all the government benefits, without the need to wait for a tax return. The electricity generated is credited to the customer's electric bill.

The price of an installed panel is \$812.50, with the payback period expected to be 12 years. For more information on the Putney Solar Garden visit [www.VTSolarGardens.com](http://www.VTSolarGardens.com), email [info@VTSolarGardens.com](mailto:info@VTSolarGardens.com) or call (802) 536-4471. 