

# Helping **COMMUNITY SOLAR** Work for Municipalities (and Residents) in Illinois



Photo Courtesy: StraightUp Solar

**A**cquiring community solar subscribers is a challenge for renewable energy developers.

So, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus identified the perfect community solar customers: municipalities. Municipalities do not move, they usually have good credit, and they have multiple small utility accounts that meet the requirements of Illinois' new community solar program.

The Caucus started the Community Solar Clearinghouse Solutions Program (CS<sup>2</sup> Program) to pool municipal subscribers and match them with community solar projects under development.

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***“The CS<sup>2</sup> program simplifies the subscription process for municipalities by identifying utility accounts that would realize savings, procuring the best rate from solar developers, and managing contracts and billing for communities to ensure cost savings.”***

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Through the CS<sup>2</sup> program, eight communities subscribed to the first community solar project in Illinois: Rainy Solar in Elgin. “The aggregated demand of these subscriptions is approximately 535 kW AC of the 900 kW AC available for that system, or 59% of the system,” said Mark Pruitt, the CS<sup>2</sup> program manager. The communities

will earn bill credits that will result in 10% electricity supply cost savings for the next 20 years.

“Many of these municipalities are among the 130+ that have adopted the Caucus’[s] Greenest Region Compact and pledged support for sustainability goals, including several clean energy goals,” said Edith Makra, the Caucus’s Director of Environmental Initiatives.

Among Caucus members, which include 275 municipalities in northern Illinois, two other villages have also signed on to different community solar projects. One of those communities is the Village of Thornton in the south suburbs of Chicago, which has a population of approximately 2,500.

“The Village [of Thornton] decided to get involved primarily because, as a Greenest Region Compact community, we have made a commitment to lessen our carbon footprint on the planet,” Thornton Mayor Bob Kolosh said. “As a small community, we really have no way to develop our own solar, so we see community solar as a way to support and benefit from clean solar energy.”

In September of 2019, the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) recognized the CS<sup>2</sup> Program’s innovative approach to help communities subscribe their public facilities to community solar with a prestigious 3iAward.

After winning the award, Makra and Pruitt didn’t rest, instead finding other ways to promote community solar. In partnership with eight North Shore Electricity Aggregation Consortium (NSEAC) communities, they launched a new program in September 2020 that allows municipalities to connect their residents to community solar subscriptions. This will scale up a successful pilot residential community solar aggregation model now underway with the Village of Oak Park. This program uses the existing municipal aggregation framework to offer 20% guaranteed electricity supply savings to residential customers.



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