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## Rockville's Solar Co-op to Help Residents Save Money Going Solar

By [Helen Triolo](#), last updated 4/6/15 03:19pm



Photo credit Pepco

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*Photo: Pepco Watershed Sustainability Center, a working laboratory for Pepco and the University of Maryland that focuses on energy efficiency and sustainable living. Showcasing new technologies, including smart thermostats, ground and rooftop mounted solar panels, electric vehicle charging ports and smart meters, WaterShed will continue its mission to educate the public on the beauty and versatility of sustainable design. This will be the location of the first Rockville Solar Co-op meeting on April 18 at 10am.*

Around 100 homeowners in Rockville now have solar panels on their roofs. Federal tax credits and a Maryland state grant help offset the initial installation cost, and now there's an additional incentive to act this year: the [Rockville Solar Co-op](#). Organized by the Rockville Environment Commission, working with [Community Power Network](#), the solar co-op enables residents to buy as a group (but with individual contracts) and save up to 25 percent on the cost of a solar system. Joining the co-op also provides members with the support of the group throughout the process.

Attend a free information session:

<http://rockvilliveliving.com/notes/rockvilles-solar-co-op-to-help-residents-save-money-going-solar>

April 18th, from 10 a.m. until noon, at the [Pepco Watershed Sustainability Center](#) (pictured above), 201 West Gude Drive, Rockville 20850;

or

May 5th, from 7 p.m. until 9 p.m. at Rockville City Hall, 111 Maryland Avenue, Rockville 20852.

The following is reprinted from the City of Rockville [April 2015 Rockville Reports](#):

Rockville homeowners who have entertained thoughts of going solar could find new incentives to do so through a solar cooperative being organized by the city's Environment Commission.

Rockville Solar Co-op is a group-purchasing program that will make it easier and more affordable for participants to install rooftop solar panels on their homes. The co-op will organize groups of neighbors to "go solar" together, to collectively make an informed purchase and negotiate a volume discount.

An information session for interested homeowners will be held from 10 a.m.-noon on Saturday, April 18 at the Pepco-Rockville Customer Service Center, at 201 West Gude Drive. In the next few years, electricity from solar is expected to become cheaper for homes than electricity via the grid. "Now is the time to get involved," said Clark Reed, chair of the Environment Commission.

Rockville is one of the first communities to establish a solar co-op as part of a grant program through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). A COG-supported solar consultant, the nonprofit Community Power Network, through its Maryland Sun program, will lead education and outreach efforts, provide technical expertise, and help guide consumers through a bulk purchase process to lower installation and equipment costs. While each homeowner signs an independent contract with the installer for their own system, participants will have the confidence that they are getting a fair price by being part of a group.

By banding together to purchase larger quantities, co-ops can reduce installation costs by up to 30 percent. "This is not something that only wealthy people are doing right now," said Reed, who works with the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program. More than 100 homes in Rockville use solar energy, including six in Reed's Twinbrook neighborhood, he said.

That wasn't the case in 2003 when, after a year of energy projects that reduced his home's energy use by 40 percent, such as compact fluorescent lighting, Energy Star-certified appliances and energy-efficient windows, Reed's family invested in solar panels. The 1 kilowatt array on the Reed home produces about 800 kilowatt-hours of electricity a year—about 30 percent of the electricity used by the home.

The average home served by Pepco uses about 11,160 kilowatt-hours of electricity a year, according to the state's Public Service Commission. Reed's home uses about 2,600 kilowatt-hours. Electricity costs for similar homes are more than \$1,000 a year. Reed's electricity costs are less than \$500 a year. Declining prices and a variety of financial incentives including state grants, federal tax credits (set to expire in 2016), net metering and solar renewable energy credits, make it a great time to "go solar." At today's rates, Reed said his family could've put three times the amount of solar panels on the roof of their home as they did in 2003. "That, I'm frankly pretty envious of," he said.

For more information, visit [MDSUN Rockville](#).

More info: <http://mdsun.org/solar-bulk-purchases/rockville>

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