



Solar United Neighbors siting policy for community solar installations

As the only national organization that represents the needs and interests of solar owners, Solar United Neighbors is dedicated to building a clean, equitable energy system that directs control and benefits back to local communities, with solar on every roof and money in every pocket.

One of our goals is to make affordable solar widely accessible for everyone, no matter where they live, their housing arrangement, or income level. Millions of Americans — including renters, co-op owners, and most small businesses — do not own their own homes or buildings. Or, their roofs are not suitable for solar due to shade, roof condition, and other practical reasons.

The solution is “community solar” (sometimes referred to as community shared solar, or solar gardens). Community solar expands access to solar by giving people the option of subscribing to a nearby solar facility, and to benefit from solar energy just as they would if the panels were on their own roof.

All energy production has impacts, but solar is far less intrusive and polluting than fossil fuels. Similarly, all development has impacts, but solar is far less intensive than building construction. Nevertheless, as the demand for community solar grows, it is important that the siting of such projects follows best practices while respecting the wishes and broad interests of the local community. Well-designed and sited community solar installations can complement agricultural production and preserve much-needed habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. In addition, community solar can help keep farmers and their descendants on their land by providing a reliable and supplemental source of income.

Solar United Neighbors believes solar siting requirements for ground-based community (and utility-scale) arrays should be developed to meet local needs, be part of the broader planning process, and be based on well-established land-use and environmental planning principles and practices. Our aim is to strike the balance between clean energy production, agricultural protection, and community wishes.

To accomplish these goals, we support the following siting and policy guidelines:

- Be located appropriately to fit the goals of the local community and to protect natural resources.
- Where available and technologically and economically feasible, be sited on previously developed land located near existing electrical infrastructure.

- Be encouraged in preferred areas such as brownfields, rooftops, and parking lots through state or local jurisdiction policies and incentives and acknowledge that absent incentives, some or all of these preferred locations may not be economically feasible.
- Be discouraged on wilderness lands and pristine natural landscapes.
- Be aware that solar needs to be sited near electrical infrastructure and that the most economically feasible locations can change over time with the capacity of the grid.
- Include opportunities for meaningful input from the general public in the decision-making process.
- When located on agricultural land, be harmonized with existing agricultural uses of the property. If this is not possible, rules should be consistent with local preservation and economic development goals.
- Be zoned by right or through conditional use whenever possible and by special exception only when necessary.
- Be supportive of tenant goals and wishes associated with an installation.
- Not limit public access to recreation areas.
- Adhere to “pollinator-friendly” standards and where possible support solar production and agriculture on the same location.

Pollinator-friendly community solar installations

Native pollinators are essential to farming and are at risk due to habitat decline and pesticides. Pollinator-friendly solar is the practice of adding attractive, native plantings under and around ground mounted solar arrays, instead of the typical gravel, concrete or turf grass. These practices support native plants, pollinators, habitat preservation, local agriculture and farmers. For example, Minnesota’s pioneering pollinator-friendly program, initiated by the non-profit organization Fresh Energy, yielded more than 2,300 acres of community solar projects. This is equivalent to installing a 6’ by 12’ pollinator garden in the backyard of every one of Minnesota’s 1.4 million single-family homes. For more detailed information on pollinator-friendly standards, see the “Resources” section below.

State guidelines

States should create model voluntary solar site management practices for municipalities, counties, and other authorities having jurisdiction to consider when drafting their siting policies. Doing so will encourage consistent local siting policies that meet best practices. To date, Minnesota, Illinois, New York, Maryland, Vermont, and South Carolina, have enacted such legislation.

Solar siting resources

[Co-locating Agriculture and Solar \(National Renewable Energy Lab Webinar\)](#)

[Center for Pollinators in Energy \(Fresh Energy\)](#)

[Minnesota's Solar Pollinator-Friendly Law](#)

[Solar Generation Facilities - Pollinator-Friendly Designation \(State of MD\)](#)

[The Pollinator-Friendly Solar Act \(NY State\)](#)

[Solar Site Pollinator Habitat Scorecard by Pollinator-Friendly Solar Initiative of Vermont](#)

[Pollinator Friendly Solar Webinar \(Webinar\)](#)

[Beekeepers Sweeten Solar Sites With the 'Tesla of Honey' \(National Geographic\)](#)

[Solar Power and Honey Bees Make a Sweet Combo in Minnesota \(Modern Farmer\)](#)

[How solar-energy sites can provide habitat for our Minnesota monarchs \(Star-Tribune\)](#)

[The business case for pollinator-friendly solar sites \(Green Biz\)](#)

[Pollinator-Friendly Solar \(Bedford 2020\)](#)

[Clean Energy, Green Communities: A Guide to Siting Renewable Energy in the Hudson Valley \(Scenic Hudson\)](#)

[Smart Solar Siting \(American Farmland Trust\)](#)

[Examining the Potential for Agricultural Benefits from Pollinator Habitat at Solar Facilities in the United States. \(National Renewable Energy Lab and the Argonne National Laboratory\)](#)

[Solar panels increase grasses for sheep and cows by 90%, PV Magazine, November 12, 2018](#)