

Community solar projects help incentives shine brighter

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Residents at a senior-living development in Franklin's Somerset section found solar incentives shone even brighter when they went in on a project as a community.

On Wednesday, Rumson-based renewable-energy firm **GeoGenix** celebrated the completion of a 10-home solar project. The concept, called community solar, groups neighbors together in order to recognize efficiencies and ultimately lower the cost of the arrays.



"It means the project manager is dealing with the same township officials; the designers and engineers are designing similar systems, because the homes are pretty much identical to each other," said **Gaurav Naik**, managing member of GeoGenix. "It gives us economies of scale that we can pass on to the homeowners."

Naik said customers can save up to 10 percent on their solar systems through this concept, and homeowners also receive a federal tax credit and state Solar Renewable Energy Certificates, which are earned based on solar energy generated and [can be sold on the open market](#).

Altogether, he said a typical homeowner can recoup the cost of a solar system in three to five years, thanks to the incentives and savings on their electric bills. The solar arrays themselves are expected to generate electricity for 25 years.

The 10 rooftop solar arrays at Somerset Run total 80 kilowatts of generating capacity, and are expected to produce nearly 100,000-kilowatt hours each year.

Stephen Levine, president of the Somerset Run Civics Club, said he and his wife expect a five-year payback period for their 8,100-watt solar array. The system cost nearly \$54,000, but after GeoGenix discounts and the federal tax credit, the system's effective cost was \$33,250. He expects to earn \$6,500 per year by selling his SRECs.

Assemblyman **Upendra Chivukula** (D-Somerset) said New Jersey has been a leader in adopting pro-renewable energy policies, but energy efficiency and energy independence remain key goals.

"When [one] look[s] at renewable energy, I [see] it as a national security issue," he said.

Chivukula lamented Gov. **Chris Christie**'s decision to take [\\$158 million from the state's Clean Energy Fund](#) last year. The money came from a societal benefit charge that is added to each ratepayer's electric or natural gas bill.

"That money doesn't belong to the state. It's not tax money," Chivukula said. "It belongs to the ratepayers, like you and me. That's why I objected to the governor taking it away."

Christie took the money to help fill the state's multibillion-dollar budget gap, but in doing so, he also left the state's solar rebate program without funding. Levine said he would have received a rebate of \$10,935 from the program. Only one of the 10 Somerset Run residents filed his application in time to get the rebate before the program was de-funded.

Naik said while Community Solar can make solar more affordable for homeowners, he also said going solar can be a good investment. When incentives and electricity savings are factored in, he said homeowners who go solar can see a 16 to 17 percent return on investment.

"The real value is the fact that it's secure," he said. "They're monitoring their investment because it sits on their roofs."

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