

# Genesee/Finger Lakes REGIONAL REVIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE GENESEE/FINGER LAKES REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

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## Solar Energy at a Crossroads in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region

Matthew Halladay

It's 2018 and the "Solar Coaster" that is New York's photovoltaic energy space has perhaps never had so many twists and turns. The regulatory docket is comprised of multiple compensation schemes used to monetize solar energy to producers—net metering and VDER (Value of Distributed Energy)—with some systems grandfathered in but some finding themselves in new territory. It's no longer enough to know that solar cells convert photons from the sun into direct current, thereby creating the foundational units of electricity, and that producers of it can be credited for excess units of energy their solar systems transmit into the grid. To speak the language of the current solar market requires knowledge of an esoteric dialect that even those most fluent in seem unable to translate. Comprehension of concepts and their associated acronyms like Community Distributed Generation

(CDG), Distributed Energy Resources (DER), Renewable Energy Certificate (REC), Reforming the Energy Vision (REV), Zero-emission Credits (ZEC), Clean Energy Standard (CES), Load Serving Entity (LES), locational-based marginal pricing (LBMP), and Demand Reduction Value (DRV), to name a few, is the ticket to riding the current solar coaster we find ourselves staring at in wonder.

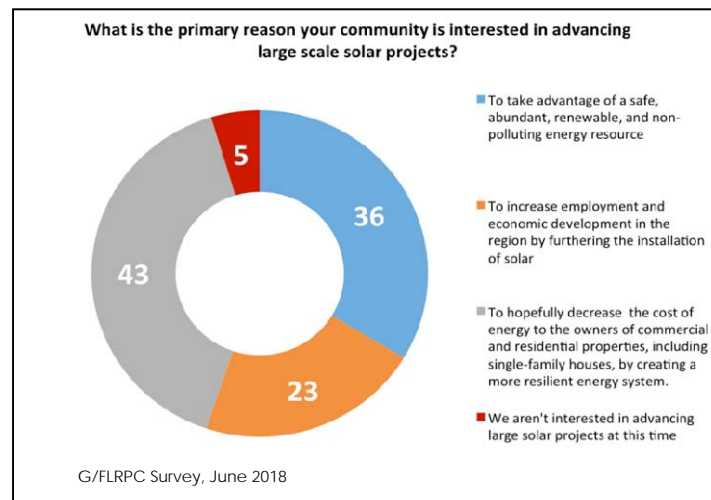
To that end, there is still significantly more work to do to achieve New York State's goal of 50% renewable

energy by 2030 while ensuring all New Yorkers "regardless of their zip code or income" have the opportunity to access clean and affordable power. As the market continues to evolve, test policy models, improve technology, achieve grid parity, and propagate this technology across our State's diverse landscape, how are our communities responding to the often messy, inconsistent narrative that developers, decision-makers, and local officials are trying to navigate

through? With competing paradigms of land use, what do our communities need to ride the solar coaster and hold on until the end? It is perhaps important now more than ever to better understand local needs that exist at different scales to help strategize and position resources.

G/FLRPC surveyed the nine county region in June of 2018 in an attempt to uncover those very needs with

the simple goal of gauging solar perceptions and needs from policy maker's perspectives. Having completed the Regional Sustainability Plan over 5 years ago, how has our region considered solar energy? If so, what types of projects do communities want to see? Does the idea of utility-scale solar sound too daunting? Does approaching this from a turn-key, silver bullet approach seem appropriate? We attempted to parse out answers to these questions and more.



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### Upcoming Regional Events

G/FLRPC Fall Local Government Workshop, Wednesday, November 14, 2018, Burgundy Basin Inn, Pittsford, NY. For more information visit <http://www.gflrpc.org>.

For further information call 585-454-0190, email [gflrpc@gflrpc.org](mailto:gflrpc@gflrpc.org)

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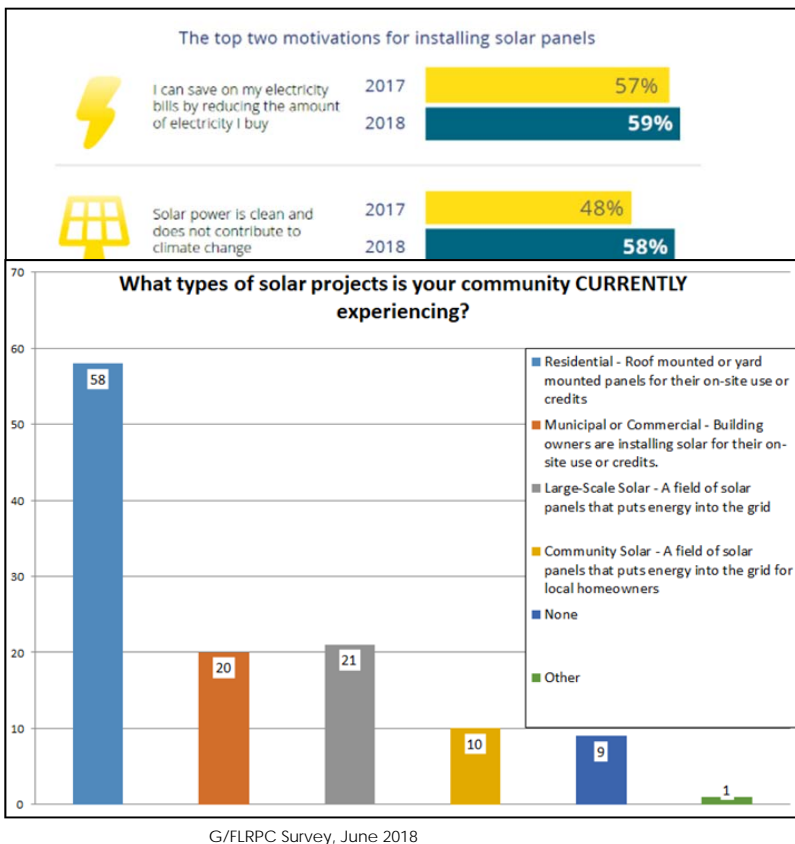
*Why are communities interested in solar in the first place?* Somewhat surprisingly, it appears the idea of job creation and economic pass-through benefits are the least attractive influences behind solar project advancement. Communities responded most frequently that they were looking to decrease the cost of energy to their constituents and wanted to take advantage of a safe, renewable energy source, respectively. This generalization aligns with a recent national poll that surveyed 1,500 residents and 600 businesses across the nation looking for motivations behind solar interest. In the world of modern communication, message framing is critical in helping deliver products and services, and there seems to be a lesson to glean from this survey conclusion.

*What types of projects are communities in our region experiencing today?* Though the state has focused its attention on the deployment of large-scale solar, these projects have been mired in the current bottleneck of interconnection and execution. Communities are still working through issues of siting, PILOT agreements, taxation discrepancies, valuation inconsistencies, and many other

land-use considerations. Behind-the-meter projects appear to still dominate the visible space in the landscape. Adopting policies and procedures that help streamline these hurdles while still creating revenue for communities is critical.

*What types of projects are communities hoping to see in our region tomorrow?*

Over 30% of respondents reported interest in seeing Community Solar projects developed in their municipality. However, the active baseline of Community Solar projects is relatively meager at 7% of total respondents indicating awareness of these projects in their area. In addition, the Finger Lakes region still ranks last in number of Solarize campaigns that have resulted in the creation of new projects (see table). Considering campaigns have saved participants approximately \$3.6 million in upfront purchase costs, for an average savings of \$1,476 per installation, there is perhaps an appetite for our region to take advantage of the Solarize platform to help drive community solar and smaller scale solar projects. Community solar was integrated into the NYSERDA



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## G/FLRPC's Revolving Loan Fund—Important Changes

The Regional Revolving Loan Fund is available\* for small and medium sized businesses needing resources and generally participates with other public and private financing tools for:

- Fixed asset loans (e.g. acquisition and improvement of land, buildings, plant and equipment, including new construction or renovation of existing facilities, demolition and site preparation)\*
- Working capital loans for the start-up of new businesses or conduct of current businesses\*

\* Loans are subject to availability of total funds and for each type of loan at time of application.

Borrowers must own and operate a business within the Genesee/Finger Lakes Region.

### Some Eligibility Requirements

- Most Industrial and service activities including:
  - Industrial & Light Manufacturing
  - Service Industries
- Retail, where opportunities for private sector jobs are greatest - **NEW!** -

### Financing Parameters

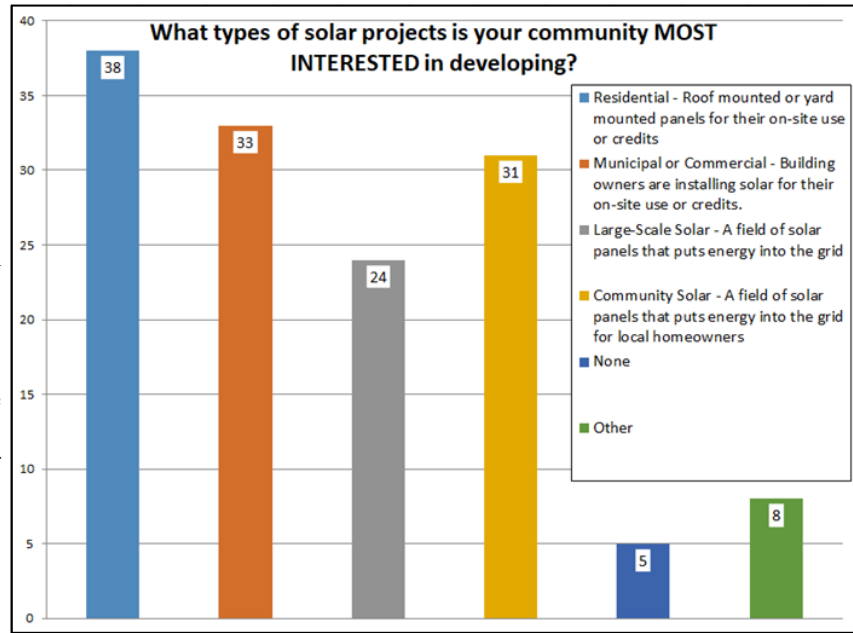
- Maximum loan is \$200,000.
- Minimum loan amount is \$20,000.
- The RLF cannot be used to substitute for available private capital and potential borrowers must demonstrate that credit is not otherwise available.
- Meet financing policies including but not limited to equity participation, repayment terms, and collateral requirements.

For additional information please contact David Zorn, 585-454-0190, [dave.zorn@gflrpc.org](mailto:dave.zorn@gflrpc.org)

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Solarize platform in 2018 and will be offering grants to run campaigns— stay tuned for more information from NYSERDA and G/FLRPC on these program opportunities.

*What's next?*  
Initial results from this survey suggest the perceptions and needs from our region's communities are both diverse and great. Surveys as a tool of inquiry offer one glimpse into the mindset of those who take it— sometimes nothing more. Those working to assist local governments and communities in planning, financing, and executing renewable energy projects should know that this landscape, like most, is far from homogenous. Our communities need to be heard from in order to provide the level of support that provides the greatest amount of



public benefit. While the State is working to make its 50% renewable vision a reality, most people agree that energy diversity and resilience is a good thing. Perhaps if we better understand the unique perspectives

and circumstances that are driving local attitudes in our region, we can have a better dialogue that leads to improved education, communication, assistance, and ultimately project creation. Our hope is that a common call to action can help solar deployment in the region take place at appropriate paces and in the right places.

If you would like additional information or you have questions please contact Matt Halladay, 585-454-0190 x 22, [mhalladay@gflrpc.org](mailto:mhalladay@gflrpc.org).

G/FLRPC Survey, June 2018

Solarize campaigns across New York State			
Region	Number of Campaigns	Total Projects	Total Megawatts
Capital Region	9	194	1.40 MW
Central New York	8	277	3.40 MW
Finger Lakes	5	99	0.81 MW
Long Island	5	115	1.03 MW
Mid-Hudson Valley	25	963	7.65 MW
New York City	5	194	0.96 MW
North Country	7	140	0.99 MW
Southern Tier	12	277	2.07 MW
Western New York	5	180	1.16 MW
<b>Total:</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>2,439</b>	<b>19.47 MW</b>



### *A Sense of Place*

#### Finger Lakes National Forest

The Finger Lakes National Forest lies on a ridge-called the backbone-between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes in the Finger Lakes region. New York State's only national forest, this multi-use land is reminiscent of western national forests with a great deal of open land and free-ranging cattle. The forest has over 30 miles of interconnecting trails that traverse gorges, ravines, pastures and woodlands. The forest is managed to provide a diversity of native forestlands, shrublands and grasslands, including areas of native older forests, diverse wildlife habitats, quality recreation areas and forage for livestock.

Wildlife in the Finger Lakes National Forest include grassland birds, including the rare Henslow's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, American kestrel, northern harrier and bobolink; shrubland birds such as the yellow warbler, Eastern towhee, brown thrasher, yellow-billed cuckoo and goldfinches; forest birds including the Northern goshawk, ruffed grouse, American woodcock and scarlet tanager; white-tailed deer; wood ducks; eastern wild turkey; beavers; bobcats; and red foxes.

Source: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/66666.html>

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*\*Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates*

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