



NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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AUSTIN UTILITIES **Announces new SOLARCHOICE Community Solar Program**

AUSTIN, Minn.— Austin Utilities announces a new community solar program named **SOLARCHOICE**. They will kick off their new program with a series of FREE community education classes explaining the program. The next class is scheduled to be held on Tuesday May 9 from 1-2 pm at the Austin Utilities Service and Operations Center. “Customers and environmental advocates have expressed an interest and desire to have community solar offered by their local utility,” says general manager Mark Nibaur. “We are glad to provide solar options for those customers interested.”

The **SOLARCHOICE** community solar program is an alternative to rooftop solar. It allows customers the opportunity to join in the solar movement without having to install solar on their property. It opens up solar participation to customers who:

- Want to participate in solar but are unable to do so due to current restrictions.
- Share a passion for solar energy resources and believe community solar is right for them.
- Want to pre-pay and “fix” a portion of their energy costs for the future.

According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), nationwide, only 25% of residential and commercial rooftops are suitable for solar, so rooftop solar is not an option for these customers. Community solar generally requires a lower upfront cost, eliminates the installation hassle and removes the burden and risk of ongoing maintenance. Larger, utility-scale solar gardens capture economies of scale that are then passed on to program participants.

Instead of putting panels on their own roof, customers subscribe to a large solar project called a community solar garden with thousands of panels. Customers purchase subscriptions, along with many other residents who share their commitment to renewable energy, for the energy produced by one or more panels in the community solar garden. Each month the customer receives a bill credit for the solar electricity generated by the subscribed panel(s) for the term of the subscriptions. Austin Utilities will offer a six-year subscription plan for \$340 per panel and a twelve-year subscription plan for \$660 per panel. Each panel is expected to average 501 kWh per year for the first twelve years. Subscriptions will be available for purchase until October 2018.

The **SOLARCHOICE** community solar garden is planned to be built in Princeton, MN on a site near the municipal airport once 25% of the planned community solar garden is under subscription by customers of AU and other SMMPA Member utilities. Princeton was found to be the most economical place to build among the 18 Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) utility members who are working together to offer this program. If the 25% threshold is not met, the new **SOLARCHOICE** program will be served by solar energy from the Lemond 5MW Solar Station Solar in Owatonna, MN that will be operating by June of 2017.

Customers who want to learn more about **SOLARCHOICE** community solar can find information at www.AustinUtilities.com.