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Community-Centric Getting to the heart of town centers

**2022 Executive
Directors Report**

Focus:
Repurposing
Community Hubs



Sustainable Jersey City

Striving to improve emissions and air quality

Debra Italiano, *Founder and Chair, Sustainable Jersey City (SJC)*

As a densely populated former industrial area, Jersey City has its share of environmental challenges. We have the highest rates of asthma in the state, and Hudson County received an “F” in air quality from the American Lung Association in 2021.



Community solar puts panels on warehouses, not homes, bringing energy and other benefits like cost savings to residents. The solar panels on this warehouse owned by Prologis, that recently acquired prior building owner Duke Realty in Wood-Ridge are now powering Jersey City homes.

Sustainable Jersey City (SJC) has been working toward cleaner air, a greener environment, and healthy communities in Jersey City since 2011. The intersection of our emissions reduction goals with New Jersey’s environmental efforts is what brought us into the community solar fold.

Community Solar: statewide program, local benefits

A New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) program that began in 2019, Community Solar involves large, centrally located solar energy projects that provide power to nearby residents. Residents simply enroll online and receive the benefits of solar, including a discount on their electricity bills, all without needing solar panels on their property. This program provides much needed cost relief and reduces our carbon footprint, helping battle climate change.

The Community Solar program is closely regulated by the BPU to ensure residents receive all promised benefits. Every project is evaluated by the BPU in a competitive process. The power generated from an approved project is fed directly into the grid, and electricity is delivered to each home through the regulated utility for Jersey City residents, PSE&G.

Thanks to energy generated by three nearby projects in Teterboro, Wood-Ridge, and North Bergen, Jersey City residents are already saving money on their utility bills. These local

projects prevent more than 5,100 metric tons of CO₂ emissions annually by reducing the use of gas-fired power plants that pollute our air. The program also supports New Jersey’s goal to achieve 100% clean energy, with an 80% reduction in state-generated greenhouse gasses by 2050.

Community engagement for clean energy and savings

Recognizing these benefits, Jersey City’s Council adopted a resolution to support local community solar projects owned and operated by Solar Landscape, a commercial solar developer based in Asbury Park. However, the concept of community solar was still new to residents, and some previously had bad experiences with third-party energy providers.

To educate residents about Community Solar, SJC engaged the public, including affordable housing providers, local community-based organizations, and the Jersey City School District. Our constituents and partner organizations who shared our belief in the benefits of this program helped spread the word as trusted voices in the Jersey City community.

To further educate and encourage enrollment, we hosted renewable energy educational events, emailed newsletters, and shared updates at meetings and over social media. We also hosted live Q&As on Instagram to demystify community solar and encourage residents to ask questions. In the end, we

successfully enrolled dozens of Jersey City residents. Our partner also provided training to Jersey City students interested in becoming solar installation professionals under their Workforce Development Program. They also partnered with SJC to provide \$20,000 in scholarships to New Jersey students who participated in their Green Ambassador Program.

Preserving open spaces, Creating energy equity

The community solar projects serving Jersey City support our goals, helping create energy equity by making solar more accessible. At least 51% of the energy produced by these projects must be provided to low- and moderate-income households. These projects preserve our precious open space too. All approved community solar projects in New Jersey are being constructed on commercial rooftops, parking lots, brownfields, and landfills. For these sites, renewable energy is often a marked upgrade.

Community Solar + green spaces: improved air quality

SJC is also working on expanding green infrastructure in Jersey City, including tree canopy restoration activities and connectivity strategies for existing green spaces to public schools.

In October, we received four awards honoring our work on the ground.

- The 2022 NJ Urban & Community Forestry Achievement Award for SJC's urban forestry-related programming, recognized our Citizen Science Tree Mapping Campaign.
- Our Trees & Trash Action Campaign that protects Jersey City's mature trees through volunteer stewardship, and our advocacy to plant trees in under-served neighborhoods.
- The Jersey City Board of Education Award honored the pilot SJC Green Corridors Program at PS 26 in collaboration with Jersey City's Parks & Forestry Division to plant 15 trees, and our efforts to involve students in

our environmental education projects.

- Clean Water Action NJ's Award recognized SJC's formation of statewide partnerships to address urban environmental health and justice issues.
- Lastly, the Greater Neighborhood Alliance (GNA) is set to present SJC with an Environmental Awareness Award for its collaboration with GNA on environmental health and justice education in Jersey City. This recognition across the board empowers us to continue and amplify our community solar outreach, and other green infrastructure efforts.

In SJC's experience, residents benefit most when the goals of state and municipal governments, non-profit organizations, and corporate entities are aligned. Community Solar providers optimizing under-utilized open spaces, combined with our efforts to create and maintain more green spaces in Jersey City, are poised to make our city, and the state, more sustainable, and resilient places to live and work. 🌱



 solarlandscape

Energizing communities for a clean energy future

Community solar projects like this one in Wood-Ridge, NJ are powering thousands of homes across the state, with lower costs guaranteed – especially for low- and moderate-income households.

www.solarlandscape.com