

“On our next agenda” by Jim Diamond, chair, Collins View Neighborhood Association

Electricity generation is Oregon’s number two emissions source, contributing 29% of the CO<sub>2</sub> our state adds to the atmosphere every year. Now we can really afford to do something besides burn carbon: use sunlight! My students ask me if I like nuclear power; I tell them I prefer fusion to fission, and I like my power plant a safe 93 million miles away. I’m not alone. A new poll by the Pew Research Center shows that **89% of all Americans** favor expanding the use of **solar power** to make electricity, but not all have access to it. Nationwide, only about one-fourth of those who want solar power have it.

Last March, Governor Kate Brown signed into law Senate Bill 1547, mandating a transition away from coal by 2040, **and** requiring the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) to establish a community solar program intended to bring solar power to anyone in Oregon who wants it.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) wrote, “*Clearly, community options are needed to expand access to solar power for renters, those with shaded roofs, and those who choose not to install a residential system on their home for financial or other reasons.*” There are a lot of us in that situation in Southwest Portland. Community Solar is coming to Oregon, but we will need to push the PUC to act not only to keep costs low but also to prioritize accessibility and equity, especially for low-income households (think about those on fixed income), underserved communities, and the broader small business community.

Environment Oregon, a statewide, citizen-based, environmental organization, recently solicited the support of Collins View Neighborhood Association in addressing administrative rulemaking on community solar (docket AR 603) by the PUC. They want the PUC to consider these other values in addition to cost, in establishing rules for community solar projects. I personally support this position. But I won’t benefit from community solar because we already have solar panels on our roof. However, I know many neighborhood people who would like solar power but are not in a position to obtain it now. This community solar program being established by the PUC will benefit them. CVNA will discuss this particular topic at its November meeting (Wednesday, November 2, 7 PM, at Riverdale High School). If you have thoughts about the matter, we’d love to hear from you. I hope to persuade CVNA to endorse this position as well.

I think this is an important issue for all of SW Portland to consider, with our dense tree canopy that often precludes efficient use of solar power. This is also a chance for our neighborhood association and other SW neighborhood associations to voice our concerns to the PUC and help shape rulemaking that will influence the way community solar power projects will be structured in Oregon for the foreseeable future. It sounds like a great opportunity to me.

For more information, see the NREL Guide to Community Solar:  
<http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy11osti/49930.pdf>

Jim is also the Environmental chair of CVNA and a Professor of Chemistry at Linfield College. He has a BS in Chemistry from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from Stanford University.