

The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County (the Defenders) filed an application for a 700kW system to be installed on prairieland owned and maintained by the Defenders. The current plan for subscribers is to include the Defenders as a 10% anchor tenant, 70% to low-income local subscribers, and 20% dedicated to Defenders membership. It should be noted that the Defenders have diligently worked for years to help establish McHenry County as a premiere location for solar installations with native underplantings that benefit pollinators and groundwater health.

Community Ownership

- Community ownership in this case means that the Defenders will have the opportunity to directly connect in a meaningful way with the community beyond our membership in procuring subscribers for the Illinois Solar For All Community Solar Project (ILSfA). Part of our Strategic Plan for 2020-2023 is to use our influence as a grassroots organization to build sound relationships between people and the natural world. A major priority in achieving these goals is direct outreach to the Latino community, African American community, multi-family dwellings/mobile home parks, and senior citizens in our area. If our project is successful and funded, we intend to do direct outreach in these areas so that our low-income residents who struggle with energy costs will be able to directly benefit from our community solar project and better engage with our organization's efforts to support the natural environment in McHenry County.
- This project will be installed on land being restored to prairie owned and maintained by the Defenders. This means that there is an opportunity to engage the community in education about the benefits of solar, native plantings, prairie restoration, groundwater recharge, and best-practices for solar plantings. Through our partnership with the McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program (MCSEEP) and our relationship with the McHenry County College, we hope the site will serve as a local educational resource and field trip destination.
- While this project is smaller in size to other community solar installations, the size of the project is limited by the site features (i.e. wetlands), the Defenders' desire to fit this solar array into an otherwise natural setting, and other financial constraints. To foster similar types of projects, it would be beneficial to create a carve-out program for smaller projects like this where the size is limited (such as community solar on vacant lots in a neighborhood, for example) and to create options for community organizations to buy out the developer's share as part of the funding setup similar to the "[partnership flip](#)" model employed in Ohio.

Community Benefit

- The immediate direct benefits of community solar for McHenry County residents and the Environmental Defenders would include procuring cheaper, cleaner, and localized energy while bringing job opportunities to those living locally during the construction
- The indirect benefits of this project are extensive. The Defenders ILSfA community solar site is near the County seat in a highly visible location where cyclists, school

buses, and the local community travel frequently. By demonstrating that smaller solar projects like ours are a benefit to the local community, we can increase awareness and improve public perception of solar installations in McHenry County.

- Indirect benefits also include the educational component to a community solar project maintained on land owned by a community nonprofit committed to environmental preservation. The land itself is managed and maintained by volunteers and represents what a very meticulously maintained prairie looks like. Through our partnership with McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program, we hope that the installation can serve as an opportunity for children to visit a working community solar farm to learn more about the benefits of clean energy, help maintain the property by removing invasive plants and cleaning up litter, and as a resource for career opportunities in land management or clean energy. The Defenders also maintain relationships with the McHenry County College, which is located just 5.5 miles from the site, and this can serve as an educational resource for students considering careers in land management or clean energy. Furthermore, as a centralized location for community solar, we hope to engage with local scout troops and other organizations.
- As it relates to meaningful involvement and engagement, this project will be operated and maintained by a grassroots environmental advocacy organization. The site itself will be planted with native plantings meant to encourage both pollinator friendly practices, but also responsible groundwater management. McHenry County is completely reliant on groundwater and our soil/substrate is such that it is easily susceptible to contamination. The site itself will serve as the example that other solar farms in the County should strive for moving forward and it will be exclusively maintained by volunteers within our community. Our plans for community education and engagement, as well as our plans to solicit subscribers in targeted areas throughout the county that will benefit low-income individuals energy costs while also reaching potential new members and environmental advocates, demonstrate what meaningful involvement and engagement look like. This project will not just be some panels in a field that's mowed six times a year, it will be a resource for our entire community to learn best practices for land management and solar integration.
- Moving forward with policy driven decision-making, the Defenders recommend that scoring should consider projects that also provide other community benefits, e.g.
 1. solar projects that provide adjacent community spaces (open space, community gardens, etc.)
 2. solar projects that provide habitat for pollinators and other wildlife (e.g. solar farms planted with native plants)
 3. solar projects that provide for groundwater recharge in areas where groundwater serves as a water source
 4. solar projects that provide for stacked benefits, (as described above in 1-3 and also, for example, projects like solar panels over public parking areas that make a parking lot serve a dual purpose)
 5. solar projects on brownfield sites that are not suitable for other development