BECOMING A NYSEARDA CLEAN ENERGY COMMUNITY
TOWN OF AMHERST IN ERIE COUNTY

Amherst is a first-ring suburb of Buffalo, New York bordering the Erie Canal and is the State’s most populous town north of the NYC metro area. Mainly suburban in character, the town’s 54 square miles includes the historic Village of Williamsville, several businesses and industrial parks, retail corridors, three school districts, and a rural area in the northern part of the town.

PROGRAM

To become a Clean Energy Community (CEC) and receive a NYSERDA grant for additional clean energy projects, Amherst was required to complete four of ten High Impact Actions to “implement clean energy actions, save energy costs, create jobs, and improve the environment.” Amherst installed a charging station, purchased the first electric vehicle (EV) for the town fleet, trained employees on energy code enforcement, adopted a solar policy and instituted the Solarize Amherst campaign. Completing these actions allowed Amherst to apply for a $250,000 NYSERDA grant, and in July 2018, the town became the first large municipality in Western NY to receive the grant. The grant will fund solar panels for a large recreation center and an additional EV charging station. Further CEC steps and actions under the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program are in planning stages.

The NYSERDA grant helped fund the implementation of the Solarize Amherst campaign, which was launched in the summer of 2017. Several Town Board resolutions were passed, including a unified solar permit and a resolution waiving building permit fees for home solar installation during the campaign. Several solar providers offered bids for group discounts, and two were selected for home and business solar. Community members attended open houses for introductions to residential solar. While the NYSERDA grant required 10 home contracts, 80 were signed during the three-month campaign.

PROCESS

In 2016, citizens from Amherst’s Energy Conservation Committee approached then Councilmember Ramona Popowich with information about NYSERDA’s Clean Energy Communities (CEC) program. Popowich worked with city officials to develop a plan to participate in the program. The plan included completing the necessary actions to qualify for the grant and setting a timeline for implementation. The Amherst town board approved the plan, and the implementation began in 2017. The plan was successful and in July 2018, Amherst received the grant.

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Energy Communities (CEC) program. Amherst formed the Clean Energy Communities Committee, including Popowich as chair, the Energy Conservation Committee chair, three Energy Conservation community volunteers and one from the Amherst Conservation Advisory Committee, Energy Manager Michael Delamere, a Town Attorney, and Planning and Building Department staff.

In January 2017, Councilmember Jacqui Berger was named as the new Liaison to the CEC Committee. A year later, the CEC Committee began implementation of the DEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC) plan along with the CEC process. An inventory of the steps that qualify under CSC is in process and the committee will plan for next steps.

**TAKEAWAYS**

The endorsement and participation of Amherst Supervisor Barry Weinstein and his successor Brian Kulpa were essential in implementing these projects. The Amherst Chamber of Commerce embraced the Solarize Amherst campaign, and citizens continue to serve on the committee, which now serves as the Climate Smart Communities task force. The University at Buffalo Regional Institute has supported the projects, guided the town through the NYSERDA grant process, and helped to access other grant sources. Local solar companies were involved, and the committee recently received a presentation from a geothermal company as it considers how geothermal heat pumps might be part of the town’s clean energy transition.

Councilmember Jacqueline Berger has the following suggestions on how to make government work, as it did in Amherst’s transition to clean energy:

- Citizens need to be supportive and willing to work with their elected officials.
- The project needs to be financially feasible.
- Most importantly, the project needs to have a leader to help guide it.

Councilmember Berger’s advice to other municipalities? “Just go for it and give it a shot! Start small and build on the project. Take on a reasonable project and it will be successful.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Contact Councilmember Jacqueline Berger at jberger@amherst.ny.us

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**ELECTRIC VEHICLE PURCHASED FOR AMHERST TOWN FLEET (ELLEN BANKS)**
STATE PROGRAMS

CLEAN ENERGY COMMUNITIES
Amherst, East Hampton, Red Hook  Under NYSERDA's Clean Energy Communities program, communities that complete four out of the 10 High Impact Actions and meet all other eligibility requirements are designated by New York State as a Clean Energy Community and are eligible to apply for grants to fund additional clean energy projects. Those ten actions are:

- **Benchmarking** - Adopt a policy to report the energy use of buildings
- **Clean Energy Upgrades** - Achieve 10% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from buildings
- **LED Street Lights** - Convert street lights to energy efficient LED technology
- **Clean Fleets** - Install electric vehicle charging stations or deploy alternative fuel vehicles
- **Solarize** - Undertake a local solarize campaign to increase the number of solar rooftops
- **Unified Solar Permit** - Streamline the approvals process for solar
- **Energy Code Enforcement Training** - Train compliance officers in energy code best practices
- **Climate Smart Communities Certification** - Get certified by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- **Community Choice Aggregation** - Put energy supply choices in your community’s hands
- **Energize New York Finance** - Offer energy upgrade financing to businesses and non-profits

CLEAN ENERGY STANDARD/RPS
Eagle, East Hampton  The Clean Energy Standard requires that 50% of New York’s electricity come from renewable energy sources such as solar and wind by 2030. New renewable projects provide enormous benefits to local communities, including reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, economic investment and PILOT payments, and new, high quality jobs in the clean energy sector.

COMMUNITY CHOICE AGGREGATION
Ossining  Community Choice Aggregation allows local governments to work together through a shared purchasing model to procure energy supply service and distributed energy resources for eligible customers within the jurisdictional boundaries of participating municipalities. Eligible customers will have the opportunity to have more control to lower their overall energy costs, to spur clean energy innovation and investment, to improve customer choice and value, and to protect the environment, thereby fulfilling an important public purpose.

GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP REBATE
Lockport  NYSERDA’s Ground Source Heat Pump Rebate provides funding for the installation of ground source heat pump systems for residences, businesses and institutions. Benefits include lower and less volatile energy bills, greater resiliency and reliability, and health benefits from this emissions-free technology.

MUNICIPAL ZERO EMISSION VEHICLE INFRASTRUCTURE REBATE PROGRAM
Amherst, DeWitt, Red Hook, Schenectady  The Municipal ZEV Infrastructure Rebate Program provides rebates to cities, towns, villages, and counties (including New York City boroughs) to install publicly available charging stations. Installation of these charging stations will help electrify New York’s transportation sector and meet its climate goals, putting local communities on the road to energy independence while helping to reduce emissions harmful to the environment.

NY-SUN
Avon, Clarkstown, Delaware, DeWitt, Grand Island, Red Hook, Schenectady  NY-Sun provides multiple resources for local governments to install solar energy, including financing, incentives, and training/education to identify opportunities and mitigate barriers, providing the tools necessary to build clean, affordable solar programs to power their communities.

REFORMING THE ENERGY VISION DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS
Schenectady  New York State is seeking demonstration projects to show how new products and services can capture latent value on the grid, and how new business models can monetize and distribute that value across third parties, utilities and customers. While New York’s investor-owned utilities have been directed to partner with third parties to develop a first round of REV demonstration projects, the utilities will continue to undertake demonstration projects until these kinds of products and services are fully integrated into core system operations.