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# D.C. Considers Community Solar Power

By: Jessica Gould  
March 8, 2012

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Jessica Gould

Pastor Peter Spann says community solar would help his church meet its mission.

The D.C. Council is considering legislation that would allow people to get their energy from solar panels anywhere in the city -- even for businesses and residents that don't get the best light themselves.

Pastor Peter Spann is proud of all the things that go on under the roof of Promised Land Baptist Church in Takoma, D.C. From weddings to baby dedications, food donations to financial planning, Spann says the church is all about opening its doors to people. Still, the roof itself poses a problem. Spann wants to go solar, but the church can't support the panels.

"The pitch of the roof is oriented east/west, and most of the sun comes from the south," says Erin Alexander, who works for Kenergy Solar. "And it's an old roof, so you'd have to redo the roof completely."

But the recreation center across the street has a roof that's perfectly suited for solar panels. Now Spann's hoping a new bill will allow him to generate solar power there. Earlier this week, Ward 7 council member Yvette Alexander introduced the Community Renewables Energy Act of 2012, which would allow two or more individuals to share the electricity produced by a single system.

Steve Seuser, a member of the solar advocacy group D.C. SUN, explains: "The problem is if people can't do solar on their own roofs, there's no way to connect a solar system they would have somewhere else on their Pepco bill. That's what this bill would do."

It's called community solar. And it means that people pay for power produced on panels anywhere in the city. Nicole Sitaraman with the D.C. Sierra Club says it's an issue of equity.

"The main people who can benefit from solar energy generation are people who own the building, who own their own home, or their own businesses," says Sitaraman. "Other people, like renters, are not able to benefit from solar energy generation."

Similar bills have been under consideration in Maryland and Virginia, and Alexander says she hopes the D.C. bill will be passed before year's end. After all, Spann says it's all about promoting clean energy, and preserving resources.

"It helps us save our money for other needs," says Spann.

And with solar power, he says he'll be able to do even more under his roof.

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Have you ever popped open a bag of potato chips only to be disappointed by the number of crisps in your bag? It's not just you. To avoid raising prices, companies often increase their "nonfunctional slack fill" or the difference between the volume of product and its container. We talk about how food packaging affects your recipe and wallet.

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A look at the growing fossil fuel divestment movement.

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NPR

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A flood of some 120 series, both new and returning, are coming to TV sets this summer. So, how to choose which ones to binge-watch by the pool? Our TV critic picks his four favorite new shows.

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