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LET’S TALK OPPORTUNITY!

Blaine County-owned solar projects

Climate champions like Jay Inslee and me see opportunity in the new energy reality. Solar power costs have come down so dramatically that an average homeowner could save \$400-\$600 per year in getting their power from a community solar project. In a community solar project, individual homeowners, rather than going through the expense of putting a solar array on their own roofs, let someone else build a lot of solar in one big project less expensively and the homeowner commits upfront as a subscriber to take a share of the power coming from the solar plant to offset their own residential power use.



The average residence uses about 11,000 kWh (kilowatt hours) per year and people may not know that the more power you use in Idaho, the higher rate you pay. On my current summer bill, the first 800 kWh of electricity per month my house uses costs 8.54¢ per kWh and the next 800 kWh cost 10.27¢ per kWh. (Which is why changing out light bulbs, installing insulation, and sealing up leaky windows really makes a difference in your bill—energy efficiency helps to keep you in the lower rate.)

Most community projects are designed so that homeowners get a savings from cheaper solar power; 2-4¢ solar power replaces kilowatt for kilowatt a homeowner’s residential 8-11¢ power use. The homeowner doesn’t get those actual electrons, as the solar power gets put onto the transmission wires with a mix of other generation sources, but the utility keeps track of the kilowatt-hours the homeowner generated at the community solar plant power and deducts those kilowatt-hours from your monthly home electrical bill.

In Idaho, city and county governments can be owners in power projects. There is a community solar project proposed at the county’s Glendale Road and Bridge site, for, I believe, \$1 per year rent to the county. But if Blaine County did this community solar project themselves, either at this site or Ohio Gulch, it could create savings in the county budget and for homeowners.

I added up Blaine County’s 2019 departmental budgets for electricity, and it looks like the annual electrical bill for the county is about \$117,000 at current retail rates. It would take a four-acre community solar farm generating just under 800 kilowatts of solar power to provide 100 percent of the county’s electricity consumption. It could also make the project a little bigger and have room in the project for homeowner subscribers to buy power at a saving compared to their current electricity rates. Maybe there can be a slice of the project reserved for low-income homeowners at even lower rates. I believe that it could also pre-sell subscriptions to those homeowners who wanted to help the county finance the project. Imagine if we help cities, who have the sewer plants’ high energy use, as well be a part of these projects; they can find savings for their cities as well.

Due to Idaho state restrictions, the county makes a modest level of return on its cash reserves. I have read through the county’s audited financials and have asked many questions of our treasurer and clerk to understand the county’s investment picture; annual returns on our reserves appear to be approximately a CD rate of return. With a community solar project, the county not only gets significant savings on its power bills, but it earns income from the homeowner subscribers; I have worked with community solar installers to model a project with current costs (\$1.25-per-watt install cost) and I have found that there could be almost \$100,000-\$150,000 in positive cash flow difference to the county in building our own community solar project.

Let’s do this!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_solar_farm

<https://www.illinoissfa.com/programs/community-solar/>

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THE WEEKLY SUN | CALENDAR

EVENT FEATURE



Dale Chihuly’s “Ulysses Cylinders,” lent by the artist, are on display in the front entrance of The Community Library. Photo credit: Dana DuGan

WALK THE LITWALK

Community Library event will show off locals and locales

BY DANA DUGAN

On Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 4:30 to 7 p.m., The Community Library will welcome visitors as they stroll through its new and improved main facility, then down the street to The Gold Mine thrift shop, and across town to its museum in Forest Service Park. Known as LitWalk, the event annually hails Ketchum’s literary history, and the library in general.

“We’re really celebrating these great new spaces,” said Carter Hedberg, director of philanthropy for The Community Library. “It’s an open house for where we are, at this moment.”

Participants can begin at the library, where the new entrance is graced with the “Ulysses Cylinders,” by glass master Dale Chihuly, with drawings by Seaver Leslie, adapted to glass. The exhibit of these Cylinders was arranged by Leslie Chihuly, and were first displayed in Dublin, Ireland.

“Dale and Leslie have a long history with the community,” Hedberg said. “This was her idea a few years ago.”

The Cylinders depict scenes from James Joyce’s “Ulysses,” which informs this year’s LitWalk. For instance, in front of the library there will be actors in 1904 Dublin costumes while guests may read portions of Joyce’s masterpiece.

Simultaneously, on a new deck with a gorgeous view of Bald Mountain, known as Hemingway’s Veranda, there will be a soapbox open to all comers. Actress Jana Arnold will manage the emcee duties. Participants may choose a subject of their own making or draw a subject from a box.

“People can rant and rave within family parameters,” Hedberg said, laughing.

Meanwhile, in the Lecture Hall, reading from their favorite books will be a mix of Valley-based folks, including musician R.L. Rowsey, Mariel Hemingway, Ketchum Mayor Neil Bradshaw, and authors Judith Freeman, Nick Neely, Sarah Sentilles, Julie Weston and Ridley Pearson. As well, athlete-author Rebecca Rusch will read, as will artist Carol Glenn, her husband actor Scott Glenn, and tennis star Mats Wilander.

Docents will engage with the public in a tour of the new library space. Sun Valley Resort is donating food, which will be served in the library. There will be raffles for such items as a ski pass; a dinner at Michel’s Christiania at the Hemingway table; a stay in the Hemingway Suite at the Sun Valley Lodge; a visit to the Hemingway House, which is owned by the library; and a round of shooting at the Sun Valley Gun Club.

In the Betty Olsen Reading Room, which will house the Regional History Department, participants of all ages may add to a “My Own Favorite



Mariel Hemingway reads at the LitWalk last year in Forest Service Park. This year, the readings will take place at the main library on Spruce Avenue in Ketchum. Photo credit: Gary Morrison

Idaho” art mural on the floor. In another conference room there, adults can try their hand at coloring.

On the library green along Fourth Street, kids’ activities will include bubble blowing, free snacks and Toni’s Ice Cream.

Taqueria Al Pastor will sell full tacos for just \$1 in front of Gold Mine Consign. And at The Gold Mine thrift store (both of which support The Community Library), the acoustic trio Dewey, Pickette & Howe will play outside. The band is featured on the CD “Keeping It Home,” which features all Idaho musicians, released last year. The CD will be for sale, with the proceeds supporting The Community Library. Warfield Distillery & Brewery will sell thirsty strollers wine and beer at both locations.

From there, it’s onward to Forest Service Park, where the Sun Valley Museum of History is located. The museum, also operated by The Community Library, has a “Hemingway: At Home In Idaho” exhibition, along with other intriguing pieces from the area’s past. Inside, people may jump into a photo booth to have their picture snapped with Ernest “Papa” Hemingway.

The museum will remain open until 8:30 p.m. while the weekly free concert, Ketch’em Alive, takes place, featuring, for this show, the music of Lukewarm of Lost River Disco.

For more information about the LitWalk event, or The Community Library’s many offerings, visit comlib.org.

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