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Solar Energy Boosts Affordable Housing in Seattle

SEATTLE, WA (October 5, 2017) - Affordable housing in Seattle just got a boost from the sun: Three Capitol Hill Housing properties, home to 147 low-income residents, will get rooftop solar power to generate their own electricity and reduce operating costs. With critical support from Seattle City Light's Green Up Grant Program, the installations cap years of planning with Capitol Hill Housing by non-profit Spark Northwest (formerly Northwest SEED) and partner Emerald Cities Seattle.

Despite boasting some of the lowest electricity prices in the country, a recent American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy study reported that 55% of low income households face an energy burden (energy costs as percentage of income) that is more than double the typical Seattle household. "It's been a great team effort to bridge the green divide and bring solar energy to communities who struggle to cover basic needs such as electricity," noted Spark Northwest's Executive Director Jennifer Grove.

In 2014, Spark Northwest launched Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) for All, convening stakeholders from the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, the Housing Development Consortium, Interstate Renewable Energy Council and others, to investigate ways to bring solar energy to multifamily affordable housing in Seattle. Emerald Cities Seattle offered a tested model, combining low-interest loans with energy efficiency retrofits, to create a positive cash flow from day one. Spark Northwest brought solar energy expertise to the mix for a winning recipe. "It just makes sense to bundle solar energy with efficiency, so housing providers can save even more," said Steve Gelb, Director of Emerald Cities Seattle.

Over the past three years, ACE for All stakeholders created financial models, researched policy options for customer bill credits, and took a crash course in project finance to develop viable options for housing providers. In 2016, Spark Northwest published "[*Affordable Clean Energy for All: A Guide to Installing Solar PV on Multifamily Housing in Washington*](#)," which offers housing providers a step-by-step guide to going solar. However, Spark Northwest wanted to find a model that would also deliver benefits to multifamily residents. This month, the Interstate Renewable Energy Council published "[*Access for All: Pathways to Expand Solar Access to Renters and Multifamily Households in the City of Seattle*](#)." Developed in collaboration with Spark Northwest, this document illuminates the potential for sharing solar benefits with residents through on-site and off-site installations. Mikhaila Gonzales, Project Manager at Spark Northwest, is excited to see solar energy at work for renters. "When you own your own home, you can choose to go solar, but when you rent, you don't control your roof. The goal of ACE for All is to find ways for more people to participate in the clean energy economy."

That goal became a reality when Spark Northwest and Emerald Cities Seattle led Capitol Hill Housing through the process of going solar on three sites and securing the funds to make it happen. GRID Alternatives, a nationally recognized non-profit solar installer, supported site

evaluations with a remote computer-based assessment tool. Seattle City Light's Green Up Grants program awarded a total of \$225,000 to the three projects, paving the way for Capitol Hill Housing to move forward on an investment of over \$518,000 that will yield energy savings for the next 30 years. The solar projects establish a building improvement fund and will involve residents in deciding how to spend it. Joel Sisolak of Capitol Hill Housing said, "This demonstrates a pathway for affordable housing providers and tenants to participate in the clean energy economy, where they have been historically excluded."

Spark Northwest and Emerald Cities Seattle are in ongoing discussions with housing providers to scale up the demonstration projects to install a megawatt of solar on multifamily rooftops by the end of June 2019. The installations will not only provide energy savings for the housing providers, but also will sustain family wage solar installation jobs.

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About Spark Northwest: Spark Northwest, a nonprofit organization founded in 2001, accelerates the shift to clean energy one community at a time. Their programs make affordable, locally-controlled clean energy more accessible for all. sparknorthwest.org

About Emerald Cities Seattle: Working at the intersection of equity and environment, the Emerald Cities Seattle RENEW program is a one-stop-shop model focused on improving water and energy efficiency in affordable housing, while developing career pathways with living wages. emeraldcities.org/cities/seattle