



Energy Progress in the General Assembly

By Rick Keller*

In its 2020 session, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that will boost Northern Virginia's ability to meet its climate goals.



The Solar Freedom Act breaks down barriers to distributed generation (primarily rooftop solar). The Clean Economy Act calls for a build-out of utility-scale wind, offshore wind, and solar facilities.

The Solar Freedom Act raises the cap on the total amount of net metered solar allowed from 1% currently to 6% of total electricity usage.

In practical terms, for governments, nonprofits, and commercial entities, this means the following:

- The allowable size of net-metered commercial projects will increase from 1 MW today to 3 MW. This may make solar installations on large commercial buildings more attractive.
- Fairfax County can move forward on a 5 MW solar project on a closed landfill, with the electricity serving government facilities.
- Third-party power purchase agreements (PPAs) can now generate up to 1000 MW in Dominion territory, and more types of organizations and individuals can now take advantage of this program. This means that Fairfax County's contracts for solar projects on over 100 county buildings and schools will be able to fully leverage its solar PPA, and other jurisdictions will be leveraging the same contract to take advantage of its lower electricity rates. In Arlington, this provides a potential source for solar panels on Lubber Run. For Alexandria, this provides a means to install solar on all government buildings.

For residential energy users, the Solar Freedom Act delivers the following benefits:

- The allowable size of residential net-metered projects will increase to 25 kW. This will aid larger residential units, like garden apartment complexes.

- It allows residents of apartment buildings and condominiums to participate in shared solar programs using on-site solar facilities. Prior to this legislation, townhouses could not share installed renewable energy among the different addresses. Another bill provides some relief from some HOA restrictions on rooftop installations.
- It allows customers to install enough solar to meet 150% of their previous year's demand, recognizing the needs of growing families and EV owners. The previous limit was 100% so if net-metered home installations exceeded that amount, no credit was given.
- It removes standby charges for residential customers with solar facilities of less than 15 kW in Dominion territory.

The Clean Economy Act focus is ambitious and utility-scale. The CEA sets a target of 100% carbon-free electricity by 2045 in Dominion territory. In addition to requiring over 16,100 MW (Dominion) of solar and wind, and 5,200 MW of offshore wind, it requires carbon reductions, coal plant closures, battery storage, and energy efficiency. The latter provisions are weaker than the Sierra Club would have wished, but they still show progress. The Act's Renewable Portfolio Standard includes biomass subsidies for places like paper mills, but hopefully this can be addressed in the future.

The above provisions will help Northern Virginia reduce greenhouse gases and move toward communitywide zero-carbon goals that have been established by local governments. It is now up to our locally-elected officials to take the next steps to achieve those goals.

**Note: portions of the above article have been taken from Sierra Club Virginia Chapter sources.*

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