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Nonprofit Partnership Chosen to Ensure Equitable Access to Solar Energy for CA Multifamily Affordable Housing

New \$1B program benefits low-income renters and affordable housing providers

SAN DIEGO, CA (Aug. 29, 2018) – A team of leading clean energy and affordable housing organizations in California will run the state’s new **Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SOMAH)** program. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) initiative will provide up to \$100 million annually for 10 years to fund solar energy installations on multifamily housing serving low-income and disadvantaged communities throughout the state, with a goal to help reduce energy bills for residents.

The SOMAH Program Administrator team includes the [Center for Sustainable Energy](#), [Association for Energy Affordability](#) and [GRID Alternatives](#), with implementation assistance from the [California Housing Partnership Corporation](#), [Rising Sun Energy Center](#) and [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#), among others.

The CPUC Energy Division selected this team based on their long-term experience in implementing statewide renewable energy and energy efficiency programs and working with affordable housing owners and tenants to maximize participation and community benefits.

“The idea behind SOMAH is to ensure equal access to solar energy for all California households, regardless of income levels,” said Benjamin Airth, a senior specialist in distributed energy resources at the Center for Sustainable Energy. “Low-income renters pay a higher percentage of their income on utility bills, and improving access to solar means lower bills, better housing security and a cleaner, healthier environment for all Californians.”

The SOMAH program was created by California Assembly Bill (AB) 693 introduced by Assembly Member Susan Eggman (District 13, Stockton) to help California meet its climate goals, reduce energy bills for low-income residents and ensure that clean energy infrastructure isn’t just for the wealthy. The largest investment of its kind in the nation, it provides up to \$1 billion over the next decade from five of the state’s investor-owned utilities’ greenhouse gas cap-and-trade auction proceeds to fully subsidize 300 megawatts of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on affordable multifamily properties throughout the state by 2030.



A solar photovoltaic (PV) system atop the 34-unit multifamily affordable housing Townspeople Apartments in San Diego provides 88% of its production to tenants.
Photo courtesy Center for Sustainable Energy
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By comparison, over the past 10 years the former Multifamily Affordable Solar Housing (MASH) program resulted in about 34 megawatts of energy installed statewide. SOMAH will build on the many lessons learned from the MASH program, including tenant savings and workforce development.

“This is an incredible opportunity to put clean energy to work for whole communities,” said Cathleen Monahan, vice president of program administration at GRID Alternatives. “Each project will generate local clean energy, substantially reduce energy bills for families and provide community members with paid workforce training opportunities to help them access jobs in California’s robust solar market.”

To receive SOMAH incentives, the property must either be in a designated disadvantaged community or have at least 80 percent of its households with incomes at or below 60 percent of the area median income. The CPUC estimates more than 3,500 multifamily affordable properties across the state qualify, encompassing nearly 255,000 individual households.

AB 693 requires SOMAH projects to provide at least 51 percent of the clean energy produced from a PV system to tenants to reduce their bills. It allows each household to receive a utility bill credit for a proportionate share of the energy generated by the building’s system under a utility tariff called virtual net energy metering.

“SOMAH will unlock the benefits of healthy, affordable energy for the underserved Californians who need it most,” said Stephanie Wang, policy director at the California Housing Partnership Corporation. “This program will also help to preserve affordable homes threatened by rising energy and housing costs.”

Technical assistance for property owners and residents is integrated into all SOMAH services, from the initial incentive application process through the postinstallation period during which the program will continue to provide long-term support with billing, monitoring and operations necessary to ensure system performance and energy savings.

“We also want property owners and operators to develop an understanding of other energy programs and options available for technical assistance, including energy efficiency, benchmarking, energy storage and additional improvements related to energy use, such as electric vehicle charging,” said Andrew Brooks, director of West Coast operations at the Association for Energy Affordability.

The SOMAH program is expected to launch in late 2018. In the interim, the SOMAH team will establish program guidelines, a handbook for property owners and contractors, training programs and a web-based bidding portal. For more information and to sign up for SOMAH program email updates, visit CalSOMAH.org.

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About SOMAH

The [Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing](#) (SOMAH) program provides up to \$100 million annually in financial incentives for installing photovoltaic (PV) energy systems on multifamily affordable housing in California. The program’s unique, community-based approach ensures long-term, direct economic benefits for low-income households; helps catalyze the market for solar on multifamily housing; and creates jobs. SOMAH is funded by the [California Public Utilities Commission](#) (CPUC) through the greenhouse gas allowance auction proceeds of Pacific Gas and Electric Company, San Diego Gas & Electric Company, Southern California Edison Company, Liberty Utilities Company and PacifiCorp. SOMAH aims to install 300 megawatts of generating capacity by 2030.