Solar Lobby Day 2020: Energy for the People

By Cara Cooper, Coordinator, KY Solar Advocacy Network

There is nothing quite like the excitement of a lobby day. The hours and hours of organizing and coordination culminates in dozens of meetings with legislators. It’s exhilarating. It’s exhausting. And it’s so important.

On February 11th, the KY Solar Advocacy Network hosted our Energy for the People Lobby Day in Frankfort. We had around 50 people attend and meet with 30 legislators. It was a mix of experienced citizen lobbyists and brand new folks. We had older people, younger people, and children. It was a beautiful day of democracy in action. Through these meetings, we educated legislators about two important bills in the legislature this session, HB 323 and HB 126, and we were able to secure many new co-sponsors for each. Without our efforts, they may have never heard of these bills, and they definitely wouldn’t have had faces and stories to connect with their impacts.

HB 323 is a “Net Metering Phase-In” bill. It seeks to fix one of the many problems with
last year’s bad solar bill, SB100, by extending the grandfathering period by five years. This would help the growing solar industry have a little more time to adjust their business model before the incentives (both state and federal) diminish. This bill was introduced by Representative DuPlessis, our republican champion in last year’s Net Metering fight. And with several Republican co-sponsors, it actually has a chance of going somewhere. Clearly, HB 323 isn’t everything that we need, but it is a small step in the right direction.

HB 126 is a utility reform bill which would both add explicit language to the Public Service Commission mandate that they must consider affordability when setting rates, and it allows for management audits in conjunction with rate setting. Management audits are a great way of having the utility look at their internal practices and encourage responsible spending before asking for rate increases. Past Kentucky PSCs have considered affordability; however, our current PSC believes that doing so would actually violate the law. Many other states include something to this effect in their PSC mission statements; we should, too.

Many people feel like their voice doesn’t matter in our government. However, citizen lobbying is one of the best ways to combat that feeling. For fifteen minutes, you get to sit in front of a legislator and deliver your concerns directly to them. They may not agree, but they will usually listen. It is incredibly empowering, and we’ve seen that it really does make a difference. If our legislators don’t hear from us, how can we expect them to vote with our interests in mind?

What I have personally learned from lobbying my elected officials is that they are just regular people. They aren’t anymore important or special than any of us. And they are asked to make a lot of decisions every day on our behalf, oftentimes without the information they need to make good decisions. Direct communication with our legislators helps to ensure that they have good information and that they know that they have the support of constituents if they stand up for the issues we care about. It means that they are hearing from real people and not just industry lobbyists.

If you don’t have time or capacity to get to Frankfort, making a call to the legislative message Line is a great and effective alternative. It takes five minutes, and you can leave messages for as many legislators as your heart desires. 1-800-372-7181

For more information on the 2020 Kentucky legislative session bills, visit the Kentucky Conservation Committee and the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission (LRC) website.
Net-Metering Certainty Act

By Andy McDonald, KYSES Board Member

In 2019, the Kentucky Legislature passed Senate Bill 100, which eliminated the one-to-one credit for future solar net-metering customers and created great uncertainty for rooftop solar in Kentucky. HB 323, sponsored by Rep. Jim DuPlessis (R), would revise the net metering statute to provide more certainty to Kentucky’s small solar businesses and people seeking to use solar energy.

SB100 directs the Public Service Commission to establish new rates for future net metering customers through rate cases that will be brought by each regulated utility. After those rate cases are resolved, the new net metering rates would immediately be in effect. We do not know what those new rates will be or when they will take effect, which is hard for solar businesses and people considering investing in solar for their home.

What HB 323 Would Do?

HB 323 would enable customers who purchase solar panels and have them installed between July 1, 2020 and Dec. 31, 2024 to receive a 1:1 energy credit until Dec. 31, 2029. Regardless of how or when the PSC rate cases turn out, people would know that the current 1:1 crediting system would remain in place through the end of 2029.

What About Grandfathered Solar Customers?

Under the current law existing net metering customers and any customer who installs solar before the PSC’s net metering rate cases are resolved would be “grandfathered” under the current 1:1 crediting system for 25 years. HB 323 would not change this.

Kentuckians can still install solar using traditional net metering and be grandfathered with the 1:1 crediting system until the PSC resolves these rate cases. At this time, no utilities have filed a net metering rate case.

Take Action: Contact Your Legislator

- Please call the Legislative Message Line at 1-800-372-7181. Leave a
message for your Representative and the House Natural Resources and Energy Committee. Ask them to **vote YES on HB 323** and support Kentucky’s small solar businesses.


For more information on the 2020 Kentucky legislative session bills, visit the [Kentucky Conservation Committee](https://www.kyconservation.org/) and the [Kentucky Legislative Research Commission (LRC)](https://www.lrc.ky.gov/) website.

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**Solarize Lexington**

By Rachel Norton, Solarize Lexington Chair and Residential Energy Specialist with Mountain Association of Community and Economic Development (MACED), and Barbara Szubinska

In late summer, 2018, a group of solar enthusiasts gathered in Lexington to brainstorm ways to double the number of roof-top solar installations in our city. We were inspired by the very successful model established in Bloomington, IN, called SIREN. SIREN is a partnership between volunteers and the city that organizes group purchases of solar installations to secure a discounted price. This discounted rate is made possible when
volunteers gather multiple solar contracts within a city. This allows contractors to purchase panels in bulk, as well as schedule their work more efficiently. They can then pass on those discounts to the customer base.

We started by meeting with the City Council members and were successful in getting a Solar Resolution passed in December, 2018, but we were not able to get the city to partner with us. Undeterred, we collected RFPs from local installers and selected one, Solar Energy Solutions. Next, we publicized our campaign online (solarkentucly.org), and conducted a series of information sessions around town. Energy efficiency was an important part of our workshops in addition to explaining the process of going solar.

The program gave 25 homeowners the freedom to produce their own electricity through rooftop installations at a 15% discount. With such success, we decided to run a short “encore.” The encore program ran through the end of October, doubling the number of roof-top solar installations in Lexington. The final number of projects came to 34 with the 256 kW installed.

Solarize Lexington (group of volunteers including from left: Barbara Szubinska, Rachel Norton, and David Butler; not in the picture Matthew Gidcomb, Chris Woolery, and Cathy Clement) received an award from the Environmental Commission for their exemplary work in solar energy in the city of Lexington.
EPA’s Benefits per Kilowatt-hour Values

By Kris O’Daniel, KYSES Board Member

A 9 kW array like this one will yield avoided emissions worth between $225 and $900 annually depending on the region.

State and local government policymakers have increasingly been asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for help in understanding the opportunities for using renewable energy and energy efficiency (RE/EE) to reduce air pollution and improve public health. Many recognize that RE/EE programs and policies can reduce air pollution emissions from electric power sector either by displacing fossil fuel-based generation or by decreasing demand for electricity with zero-emitting sources of generation. They also recognize that these avoided emissions may lead to tangible public health benefits, such as reducing pre-mature death, incidences of respiratory and cardio-vascular illnesses, and missed work and school days. Yet, policymakers were asking for a monetary value of these avoided emissions. EPA has recently rolled out an engine for calculating benefits of renewables. Those are called Benefits Per Kilowatt-hour (BPK). The BPK values do not include other pollution reduction benefits of RE/EE, such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions and reduced impacts to ecosystems.

EPA divided the continental US into ten regions. Most of Kentucky is in the Southeast region, except for Eastern Kentucky, which is in Great Lakes/Mid Atlantic.

EPA uses 3% and 7% discount rates in economic analysis to evaluate future benefits against a current capital investment that produces future recurring benefits in energy bill savings and health expenses. A 3% discount rate is considered "low" and appropriate for public investments; a 7% discount rate is more reflective of the return that a private investor would seek. EPA used both to enable the readers to apply their own preferred economic criteria (and to avoid starting an argument about the discount rate).
Estimated Annual Health Benefits

To estimate the health benefits for the Commonwealth, EPA uses different BPK values for two regions:

1. The Southeast which is most of KY, including Western and South-Central Kentucky: $1.83-$3.70

2. The Great Lakes/Mid-Atlantic for most of Eastern part of Kentucky: $3.87-$7.39. Since Eastern Kentucky has higher levels of premature mortality, respiratory diseases etc. and of damaging emissions (NOx, SO2, particulate matter, etc.), reducing emissions in this region produces more health-related savings. Thus, BPK values are higher.

The BKP values are then multiplied by the amount of electricity a given project will generate.

Annual Health Benefits from a 10 MW solar farm, like the KU’s facility in Burgin, KY in the Southeast region come to $250,000-$500,000 while the same size solar farm located in the Great Lakes/Mid-Atlantic region: (Eastern Kentucky) would generate double ANNUAL savings, $500,000-$1,000,000

KYSES members have been very active working for 18 months on urging the Louisville government to set a goal of powering Metro government with 100% renewable energy. On February 6th, we succeeded! The Metro Council voted 15-4 in support of a resolution to reach 100 percent renewable energy. The gathered advocates gave the Council loud applause.

The resolution specifically urges Louisville to transition city operations to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030, to 100 percent clean energy by 2035 — including both electricity and natural gas — and to attain 100 percent clean energy throughout the community by 2040.

The resolution also says the council will support public participation in climate decision making, and support revised building codes that incorporate effective energy efficiency standards. It cites expected public health benefits, and the potential for job creation from installing renewables and energy efficiency measures.

Louisville now joins more than 150 cities around the country that have committed to achieving 100 percent renewable energy, per the Sierra Club.
The coalition which drafted and supported the resolution is the ‘Renewable Energy Alliance for Louisville,’ and often refers to themselves as 100% REAL. KYSES member Sam Avery has often acted as spokesperson for REAL. Nancy Givens and Wallace McMullen are also actively involved in REAL.

The city is not legally bound to take any action by this aspirational resolution. But it creates a policy statement that advocates regard as important. Bill sponsor Councilman Brandon Coan described it during the Council’s debate as a “big bold goal.” This is “a generational goal,” Coan said. “The rate of change accelerates. Technology changes, the markets change, the laws are being changed by other states across the country and this wave is going to wash over us.”

Councilman Markus Winkler (D-17) said the resolution sets goals that the city should strive to achieve. “The way that we move forward is with big and ambitious goals,” Winkler said.

Councilman Bill Hollander (D-9) said acting on climate change is the most important thing he will do in his time on Metro Council. “I’m confident that at the end of the day, more than anything we’ve talked about or will talk about during my time on Metro Council, I’m going to be asked what did you do when this climate crisis came. And I’m not going to say ‘nothing, it was too hard.’ I’ll be a proud yes vote,” Hollander said.

The Climate Crisis is 100% REAL! say the 300 yard signs our members have distributed. Now the real battles over putting some money and real legislation into climate action lie ahead for the group of REAL advocates.

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