

Community Description

Description of basic attributes of community including population, number of owner occupied residences, and other community characteristics.

The Town of Needham, a residential suburb of Norfolk County, is located on rocky uplands within a loop of the Charles River in Eastern Massachusetts. The town is bordered by Wellesley on the west and northwest, Newton on the north and northeast, the West Roxbury section of Boston on the east, Dedham on the southeast, and Westwood and Dover on the south. Needham is ten miles southwest of Boston and has a total area of 12.7 square miles.

Established as a town in 1711, Needham is governed by a representative form of town meeting and a five-member Board of Selectmen. The day-to-day management is under the direction of a Town Manager. School affairs are administered by a seven-member School Committee and a Superintendent of Schools. Needham has a population of 28,886 (2010 Census). 88.5 percent of the households are single-family homes and homeowners occupy 84 percent of Needham's residences. The Town is classified as an economically developed suburb, with a median household income of \$114,365. The median age is 40.3 years and more than 70 percent of Needham Residents having obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. The Town has an "AAA" credit rating from Standard and Poor's.

The Town's economy has a diverse mix of manufacturing, services and commercial trade. Needham's commerce, accessibility to Route 128 and Boston, fine schools and public services have contributed to the Town's emergence as one of the more desirable suburbs of Boston. Needham is served by NStar for both Electricity and Natural Gas.

Needhamites take pride in their community and their schools. The Town celebrated its 300th birthday in 2011 with a year of festivities. The Town operates eight schools which serve 5,476 students and consistently rank highly in all measures of achievement. One measure of the Town's stability is that enrollment has increased annually over the past 20 years. We have a vibrant civic life – over 600 volunteers serve on Town Committees and Boards. The Town is home to three separate business districts and draws shoppers and workers from surrounding towns. Needham is also home to two newspapers, more than a fifteen Houses of Worship, and over 75 volunteer athletic, civic, cultural, community service, fraternal and youth organizations.

According to the Town's 2012 Citizen Survey of randomly selected residents:

- 98 percent feel that Needham is a good or excellent place to live,
- 88 percent feel that Needham is a good or excellent place to volunteer,
- 89 percent of residents recycle
- 74 percent have lived here for more than five years and 90 percent plan on living here for at least 5 more years

Marketing and Outreach Plan

Outline a marketing plan that describes methods to create community awareness around the Solarize Mass program. Describe ways in which a joint marketing strategy between the community and the selected Installer could increase the number of sign-ups for a solar site assessment and expand solar PV adoption within the community. Provide a plan for implementation, including methods to engage additional community members and volunteers. This could include an outreach activity timeline, expected volunteer activity hours, preliminary goals for community participation and solar PV adoption during the program. Include information on where community events could be held, including the Solar 101 meeting.

The Needham Solarize Campaign will use a multi-level, multi-strategy approach to build community awareness, interest and participation in the Solarize campaign. Our experience has taught us that, in Needham, the best campaign strategy is to get general information in circulation, followed by neighbors reaching out to neighbors. As previously described, we see the Solar Team as a key resource for the Solarize Program and the Solarize Coach.

Preparation for Solarize:

Before the launch of the Solarize Needham campaign, the Solar Coach and Solar Team will:

- Refine the outreach and marketing strategy
- Identify an individual to serve as the Assistant Solar Coach. We anticipate that this individual will assist with back office efforts, including developing and maintaining databases
- Re-confirm the willingness of our Outreach Partners to participate and explore their ideas and level of involvement
- Create marketing materials and branding
- Create the Solarize Needham campaign messaging
- Design and produce posters and other outreach materials

Initial outreach to pre-identified prospects

Once the solar installer is in place and the program can formally get underway, we will conduct immediate initial outreach to prospects we have already identified through:

- March 2013 Solar 101 program (~40 attendees)
- October 2013 preliminary interest survey (53 prospects)
- November 2013 Solar 101 program (not yet conducted)
- Further outreach to Green Needham's audience upon announcement of Needham's participation (capturing people more likely to demonstrate interest once the program is confirmed)

Through this jump-start, we hope to achieve some early conversions, creating a buzz and groundswell of interest that will reinforce the general outreach.

General community outreach and awareness:

During the initial weeks of the Solarize Campaign, we will engage in general community outreach to build awareness about the program. We will continue with periodic outreach and updates throughout the Solarize sign-up period. We will replicate the process that Green Needham has used in its earlier efforts. This involves outreach through general community gatherings, through Solarize-specific events aimed at specific community groups and through individual neighbor-to-neighbor communications.

The objectives of the community outreach and awareness strategy will be to:

- Alert residents that Needham is participating in the Solarize Campaign
- Explain the main components of the campaign
- Articulate the benefits of Solar and of participation in the Solarize campaign
- Inform residents of where they can obtain further information on the Solarize campaign

The primary methods for general community outreach/awareness will include:

- Creation of a Solarize Needham web site which will serve as a central source for all Solarize information, events, FAQ, etc. (We have already secured the domain name www.SolarizeNeedham.org.)
- Announcement of the program through the Green Needham web site and the Green Needham e-mail newsletter (~1,000 recipients) and rebroadcast through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media
- News, information and ongoing updates will subsequently be posted on the Solarize Needham web site and rebroadcast through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media
- Solar coach (or volunteers) will post more frequent, informal updates to generate attention on high-traffic social media sites (Facebook, possibly others)
- PR/community awareness through the Needham Cable station notices, programs and event coverage
- Working with the local Needham and MetroWest newspapers to publish feature article(s) about the launch, progress and impact of the Solarize campaign and related solar stories
- Presentations to community groups and organizations who hold regular meetings and allow guest speakers
- Program announcement made through partner organizations
- Town-wide direct mail: Adding a notice to tax or water and sewer bill mailings

- Distribution of Solarize campaign information at general community events and events run by partner organizations such as: the Town's New Years' Eve celebration, School and sports events, community concerts and business events. (The frequency of events increases as winter gives way to spring, so we are not counting on a large number of events to generate publicity in the early weeks of the program.) Posters and signs at Needham train stations, community bulletin boards, and Solarize postcards at places where residents are likely to be waiting (e.g. doctor's offices, sporting events, other children's activity locations)
- Additional approaches requiring collateral material that will be evaluated for time and cost-effectiveness:
 - Novelty displays such as a solar array on the town green, solar-powered holiday lights or solar cars
 - Lawn signs indicating a resident who has gone solar
 - Door knob hangers indicating that a resident's house is suitable for solar

Targeted Prospect Identification and Outreach

We plan to leverage community and installer expertise to identify streets and neighborhoods with good general conditions for solar PV (as well as those with already installed systems). We have access to extensive networks within Needham and a database of Town residents. We can combine this information to run targeted outreach programs in focused geographic neighborhoods. This may include door-to-door canvassing or "house parties".

Outreach to Community Partners

We have learned that outreach is most successful when it comes through trusted sources. Green Needham has existing relationships with many other school, environmental, faith-based, and community organizations and groups throughout the town. Green Needham has had prior success with conducting outreach through these existing member networks, utilizing organizational web sites, social media networks, email lists, newsletters, and in-person announcements/events. The Solar Team will identify and work with a group of Solarize outreach partners to broaden outreach and work within existing networks to build interest and participation in Solarize Needham.

Solar Ambassadors

The Solar Team will invite any resident or business who has signed up for solar (or who already has solar installed) to act as a Solar Ambassador. The Ambassadors will be given materials and organizational so that they can reach out to their own personal and community networks. We will also ask Solar Ambassadors to host open houses and other home-based events, allowing friends and neighbors to meet with the selected solar installer and other residents who have gone solar, in a more relaxed, low pressure social setting. We already had five Solar Ambassadors participate in our March 2013 Solar 101 session.

Community Education and Marketing

The Solarize Needham Campaign will also work to further educate those interested in solar, secure participation and maintain their enthusiasm. We have a number of venues for these events, including several schools, the Library, Town Hall, and religious buildings. The objectives of our education and marketing strategies will be to:

- Provide interested parties with more detailed information about solar and the components of the Solarize campaign
- Answer questions, and address concerns regarding participation in Solarize
- Forge personal relationships and connections with those interested in solar
- Facilitate communication between the solar installer and those who have signed up for Solarize
- Maintain interest and enthusiasm for those who have signed up for Solarize, but are waiting for their installation

Solar Education and Solarize Marketing:

The Needham Solar Team will host a number of informational events where those interested in solar can obtain both general information about solar power, as well as specific information the Solarize campaign. Once the solar installer has been selected, frequent, smaller scale events and informational sessions will be offered where residents can come speak directly with both the installer and residents who have/or plan to install solar to get questions answered. We have already scheduled a Solar 101 workshop, offered through Needham Community Education and scheduled for November 2013. This will be a repeat of a popular workshop we developed and hosted in March 2013, giving general information about solar PV and the opportunities and obstacles it presents.

We will also explore a number of other creative strategies through our Solarize Partners such as sponsoring a solar sign up competition or having a Solarize evening/brunch at a local restaurant.

Securing Solarize Sign Ups/Participation

To ensure that we translate interest into action, the Solar Coach and Solar Team volunteers will work with the solar installer to ensure that a personal follow-up (email, phone call, or post card) is sent to anyone who has attended a solarize education event to offer to answer any questions they may have. In addition, regular communications about Solarize campaign events, and progress will be sent to all residents and businesses who have signed up for the Solarize campaign, to sustain interest and ensure follow through with their installation during the sign up period.

Other Solarize Education and Outreach Activities

We anticipate having an Assistant Solar Coach, who will have more of a focus on back-office emphasis in order to organize our efforts. This person will spearhead such efforts as:

- Maintaining a database of prospects and contacts to facilitate outreach and track sign-ups, proposals and signed contracts
- Responding to questions/inquiries by potential customers (e.g. interested homeowners with questions about Solarize, mechanics, pricing (Solarize and other Needham homeowners who have Solar already)
- Helping homeowners assess their suitability for Solar via web tools like the US Department of Energy's IMBY (<http://mercator.nrel.gov/imby/>)
- Keeping-up regular communications with homeowners who have signed up, in order to maintain enthusiasm

Marketing Budget

Identify a preliminary budget of how the \$2,500 community marketing grant would be utilized, and whether you plan to provide a stipend (of up to \$500) to the Community Solar Coach. Optional: Tie potential expenditures to an outreach activity timeline or known events that will be taking place during the course of the Solarize Mass program.

Based on our extensive outreach experience, we have found that marketing expenses can be kept low by using social networks and highly targeted print and mail campaigns. Our preliminary budget is:

- \$500 – Solar Coach stipend
- \$500 – Signs for citizen yards and storefront windows, doorknob hangers
- \$750 – location and event costs (table fees, school custodial costs, etc.)
- \$350 – graphic design costs (if no services are donated)
- \$350 – printing and postage for mailing

Green Needham is well-acquainted with the pace of the Town's community and organizational events and knows how to use this information to effectively reach various constituencies. The early months of the year tend to be a slower time in Needham's calendar, with fewer large community events scheduled due to the uncertainty of winter weather. Our targeted approach, extensive reach in the community, and existing relationships with many organizations mean that we will not be dependent on large events in the early months of the campaign to be successful.

Additional Requirements (Maximum 1 page)

Community Permitting and Requirements				
Identify the local permitting process for solar PV projects within the community, and requirements surrounding Solarize Mass program marketing materials. This should include, but is not limited to, information on the building and electrical permitting process and fee structures, as well as any local Historic or Conservation Commission requirements that may require engagement on projects. Please use Exhibit 1 below.				
Permitting Component	Solar PV Requirements	Review Timeline	Cost	Associated Web Links
Building Permit (Roof Mounted)	Treated as a "Quick Permit" Structural review required. Wiring inspection needed	1 week in most cases, if application is complete and no zoning or wetlands issues	\$100 min	http://www.needhamma.gov/index.aspx?NID=1132
Building Permit (Ground Mounted)	If on outbuilding, same as roof-mount. Otherwise treated as new structure.**			
Electrical Permit	Required	1 week	Approx. \$60	
Conservation Commission	Very limited instances**	5-8 weeks, if required		http://www.needhamma.gov/index.aspx?NID=1254
Historical Commission	The historical commission should be notified if it is going on a historic structure for any comments or concerns. However, there are no binding restrictions.	No formal timeline		
Airport, MA DOT, other	Not anticipated	N/A		
Community Bi-laws for yard signs	Signs may be placed on provide property for up to 60 days. No permit is required. Signs related to solar installations on homes should be removed when the work is complete.		none	Needham By-laws Section 5, http://www.needhamma.gov/index.aspx?nid=1096
Community Bi-laws for banners, signs, Thermometers, etc. in public spaces	Advertising or promotional flags and banners are not permitted.		none	

Exhibit 1. Community Permitting and Requirements Chart

** Due to the fact that there is very little buildable open space in Needham, we anticipate that most solar installations will be built atop the roofs of existing structures. Generally, the Conservation Commission would only get involved when new structures (such as ground-mounted PV systems) were being built.

Proposed streamlining efforts:

The attached letter from David Roche, the Town's Building Commissioner, indicates the commitment of the Needham Building Department to work closely with the Solarize participants to quickly and efficiency handle the permitting process.