

Metropolitan Area Planning Council: Regional Solar Initiative

June 2013

Greater Boston, MA region
Population: 3.15 million
Size: 1,422 square miles
www.MAPC.org

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2013, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) was created by the Massachusetts State Legislature to serve as the regional planning agency for the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. The region is grouped into eight subregions, whose communities span Greater Boston, coastal communities, older industrial centers, rural towns and modern cities. MAPC's mission is to promote smart growth principles and regional collaboration, while working toward sound municipal management, sustainable land use, protection of natural resources, efficient and affordable transportation, a diverse housing stock, public safety, economic development, an informed public, and equity and opportunity among people of all backgrounds. A critical component of MAPC's mission is to advance equity and cultural competency both internally and in work throughout the region.

MAPC and Solar

Prompted by member interest and requests, MAPC's Clean Energy division provides a range of technical assistance services to its member cities and towns, including comprehensive energy planning as well as project-specific guidance, with the goal of advancing markets for clean technology while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on fossil fuel consumption in the Commonwealth. As part of this work, MAPC undertakes regional energy projects that help communities get lower pricing and better quality of service by bringing them together to obtain energy-related goods and services. One current project is the Regional Solar Initiative.

In 2008, the Massachusetts State Legislature enacted the "[Green Communities Act](#)," which boosts energy efficiency and encourages investment in renewable energy by providing for a statewide structure around clean energy technologies and activities. As part of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requirements set in place by the Act, the State carved out a portion to specifically support distributed solar photovoltaic facilities, increasing incentives for these projects across the Commonwealth. MAPC has been involved with advising the regulatory implementation of the Act since the beginning, and continues to serve on a Green Communities Advisory Committee convened by the State.



For MAPC, the Regional Solar Initiative began to germinate in 2011, when the organization brought together six communities to begin thinking about opportunities for renewable energy development and to secure a preliminary site assessment of renewable energy potential on their closed municipal landfills and underutilized lots. MAPC solicited quotes from vendors on a Massachusetts statewide contract, and contracted with Meridian Associates to conduct a "fatal flaw" analysis for potential commercial wind and ground-based solar photovoltaic (PV) on seven sites identified by the participating communities. The assessment determined that each community had the potential to develop PV projects on these sites.

In 2012, in order to help these and other MAPC communities move forward with potential local solar projects, MAPC created a Regional Solar Initiative that combines group procurement with peer learning opportunities. Seventeen cities and towns expressed interest in participating in this initiative to consider both rooftop and ground-based PV sites. MAPC hired the [Cadmus Group](#) to help develop a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for qualified solar developers to provide solar "energy management services" (EMS) that could help each of the 17 communities explore and advance local solar projects. The ability to procure these services through a streamlined pathway was established as part of the Green Communities Act, allowing communities to package design and construction into a single solicitation for energy project(s) with a performance guarantee.

Solar EMS contracts are long-term (up to 20 years) service agreements that include: PV system design, financing, and installation; operations, maintenance, and PV system removal; long-term lease of public space; electricity generated by a PV system; and, a system performance guarantee. A community entering into a solar EMS contract is responsible for hosting the PV system on a municipally-owned site, and purchasing all the electricity generated by the PV system. The benefit to the community is a long-term guarantee for solar energy production at a determinate price schedule without the risks of ownership. The developer owns the PV system and generates revenue by selling electricity to the community and monetizing the tax incentives and Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs) associated with solar electricity generation.

In addition to managing the EMS RFQ process, which included convening a municipal Selection Committee of municipal representatives to evaluate proposals, and facilitating interviews for top-ranked developers, MAPC also held workshops and informational sessions to educate the participating communities on the developer contracting process for municipal solar projects before the solicitation process was completed.

MAPC received 14 responses to the RFQ for solar developers, and the municipal Selection Committee identified and selected a single company, [Broadway Electrical](#), for the regional program. Upon selection, MAPC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Broadway Electrical that spelled out expectations for the program and minimum requirements to enter into individual agreements with the municipalities. As each community proceeds with their individual solar EMS contract, MAPC is strongly recommending that each city or town additionally contract with an independent "Owner's Agent"/consultant to represent their interests in technical and financial discussions and negotiations.

As the municipalities move forward with solar project development in 2013, MAPC will support solar EMS projects by providing contract development assistance for member municipalities, as well as education for vendors on how to develop more competitive responses to future RFQs. Examples of resources made available by MAPC include: Frequently Asked Questions on solar EMS Contracts and a PowerPoint on "Solar Contracting Basics". MAPC continues to provide contract guidance, model contract documents and technical support, including possible roundtable legal discussions for the contracting phase.

Lessons Learned

MAPC's work identified several lessons learned.

1. Neutral convening of interested stakeholders is critical for educational purposes and for broad-scale procurement activities.
2. Leveraging economies of scale provides group purchasing power and makes for a more attractive solicitation for vendors.
3. Establishing one point of contact through the regional planning organization allows for easy communication and feedback with the vendor, particularly for refining activities for future work.
4. Streamlining solar RFQ requirements would help provide for a closer match up to vendor capabilities.
5. Determining if the scope of work for a regional program would best be met through a single or multiple vendors is a key question to be addressed in the selection process, with no cookie-cutter answer.
6. Engaging legal review early in EMS solar contracting would help determine risks, liabilities, roles and responsibilities.
7. Pairing together education and outreach efforts with an implementation tool, such as group procurement is a good model for advancing procurement activities.
8. Connecting communities working on the same or similar projects helps promote solar throughout the region.
9. Engaging the vendor community to learn about their processes and expertise is important to educating the communities and establishing trust.
10. Determining if a single contract mechanism used by multiple municipalities to limit the legal activities and backend contracting required would be a worthwhile endeavor for both the communities and vendor.
11. Ensuring the procurement vehicle is flexible to the market demands and capabilities.
12. Gearing the marketing of such opportunity to solar vendors is important to gain the correct exposure and interest (for example, MAPC marketed to the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association).



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