

Solar array installed near Hampstead is one of the largest rooftop community solar projects in the US

By **MADISON BATEMAN**

CARROLL COUNTY TIMES | DEC 10, 2021 AT 7:30 AM



Covering the 23-acre roof of a building owned by STAG Industrial, Summit Ridge Energy's rooftop community solar project in Hampstead is capable of generating 9.2 megawatts, providing monthly energy savings to approximately 1,300 residential and small commercial customers located across the state. (Dylan Slagle)

Carroll County is now home to one of the largest rooftop solar arrays in the country after Summit Ridge Energy recently completed installation of more than 22,000 solar modules on 23 acres of unused space outside of Hampstead.

“This is one of the largest 10 rooftop systems ever built in the country and it is the largest community solar project built on a roof,” Steve Raeder, chairman and CEO of Summit Ridge Energy, said at a ribbon-cutting ceremony last week. “In fact, this may be the largest residential community solar project that’s been built in the U.S. to date.”

The 9.2 megawatt solar array, operated by Summit Ridge and jointly owned with Annapolis-based climate investment firm Hannon Armstrong, will provide energy savings to about 1,300 residential and small commercial customers located across the state.

“We are not providing electricity directly to those houses, but the electricity is converted into bill credits ... Those bill credits are then sold to users,” Raeder said.

The collection of solar panels was installed on the roof of the 1 million square-foot Penguin Random House distribution center at 630 Hanover Pike, outside Hampstead.

The large commercial warehouse is owned by STAG Industrial. Black Bear Energy facilitated the partnership between Summit Ridge and STAG, a real estate investment trust, while Powerflex provided engineering, procurement and construction services for the project.

“Over the next two-plus decades this project will deliver more than \$2.5 million of energy savings to local homes and small businesses,” said Benjamin Butcher, CEO of STAG.

According to Raeder, nearly 12 million kilowatt hours of electricity will be generated annually, offsetting 8,000 metric tons of carbon.

“That’s an annual equivalent to 2,000 cars driven, 900 million pounds of coal burned, 19,000 barrels of oil consumed ... That’s huge impact,” he said.

Mary Beth Tung, director of the Maryland Energy Administration, said installing rooftop arrays “saves our farmlands,” as well as gives everybody an opportunity to take part in the solar economy.

“Community solar provides an essential opportunity for rent-payers who cannot install solar in their homes, apartments and businesses to participate in a clean energy economy ... It provides economic growth, reduces energy costs and becomes a job creator, all while providing solutions to how we preserve the environment,” she said.

In October, the Biden administration set a target of powering 5 million American homes with community solar projects by 2025 — an ambition that would require 700% growth of current capacity.

“Continued growth in rooftop and community solar beyond 2025 is essential to meeting the state’s clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals,” Tung said.

The project brings the state one step closer to meeting its goal of having 50% of its energy come from renewable sources by 2030, with a minimum of 14.5% from solar power.

While Carroll County works to preserve quality agricultural land, Commissioner Richard Weaver, R-District 2, said the rooftop array “doesn’t take any of that land away.”

“This is a step in the right direction for the future,” he noted, adding he was “totally impressed” by how “non-evasive” the setup turned out to be.

Raeder said his company exclusively focuses on community solar because of the economic benefits, job creation, tax revenue generated and other tangible benefits it provides to residents.

Although no official plans have been made, Weaver said commissioners will discuss the possibility of developing other rooftop solar projects in Carroll County in the future.

“This is a testament to the value of private public partnerships” which involve the state, the county and several private businesses, said Ed Rothstein, R-District 5, president of the Carroll Board of County Commissioners.

“This is a great opportunity to highlight the benefits” of installing solar in unused spaces, Rothstein added.

Summit Ridge Energy, based in Arlington Va., is the country’s leading owner-operator of community solar assets. The company’s rooftop community solar portfolio across the state has grown to more than 75 megawatts, enough to power nearly 11,000 homes. About one-third of the projects will serve low-to-moderate income families, according to the company.

Earlier this year, Carroll also saw the completion of the Shepherd’s Mill Community solar farm near Union Bridge which serves more than 200 local subscribers, including 30% with low to moderate incomes. Developed by Standard Solar Inc., the farm consists of 7,200 solar panels on nearly 48 acres of land within an unincorporated area in western Carroll County.

[Madison Bateman](#) is a reporter for the Carroll County Times focusing on county government. Before joining Baltimore Sun Media in 2021, Madison worked for the Southern Maryland News reporting on county government, education and the General Assembly. She was born and raised in St. Mary's County and is a St. Mary's College of Maryland graduate.