

A Beacon of Community Owned Infrastructure – August 23, 2014

Presenters: Jackson Koeppel, Carlos Windom (*Soulardarity*, Highland Park, MI)

Midway questions/comments/clarifications

- DT is utility company in Michigan. Investor-owned so not accountable to people
- Neat to have a business to partner with as a space to use as a community hub (like they have for their community meals)

Discussion

Project goals, strategies, and strengths

- All the physical problems are the result of problems with relationships/power
- If we aren't talking about our souls and relationships, the physical problems will come back
- To think about what a just, sustainable energy system looks like, we need to change the process of making it (away from a centralized, expert-driven)
- Attempting to fix the foundational problem through the eyes of the community, the people who are affected.
- Process: Fundraising, participatory planning, ownership development
- Goal: 200 community-owned, solar-powered lights – a city-sized consumer cooperative
- We have to organize our money and political power to transition away from a fossil-fueled energy
- When infrastructure fails, we have the opportunity to fill that void in a new way

How is this project building shared relationship?

- Community meals at neighborhood business/cafe
- Celebration gathering of second solar light installation - it was a healing event.
- How were the locations decided? Participatory planning for the rest of the 200 lights

What new connections are needed to advance the project?

- Connecting to a manufacturer in the city so you are creating jobs with the production of the solar lights – learning to build the panels, production, implementation

How can/does this project help build our co-op movement?

- At the end of this process we will have lights that are cooperatively-owned and managed by the community members

Other questions?

- Do you build the lights?

- No. We are the facilitators of getting the lights put up. In the future we'd like to have a Detroit-built solar street light. There is talk of putting in wifi networks into the lights so that Highland Park would have lights and communication/internet regardless of what Detroit does.
- How did you do your initial outreach? When you found Carlos?
 - First made an advisory board so there was community input in hiring process. Sent out job descriptions.
- Where does the money come from? This is urgent, so how will this happen faster?
 - The installed cost of the full 200 lights is about \$2 million. That will probably come through city government, large-scale national fundraising, foundational grants, government grants. Upfront costs come from fundraising. Long-term maintenance could come from residents. People could pay something like \$5/year to be a part of the cooperative.
 - If the law allows it in the future we could potentially sell energy back to the city (?) from solar energy our community cooperative is generating

Resources

- NEIC (Northeast Investment Co-op) in Minneapolis
- MMIPL website – every Wednesday night at Ghandi Mahal restaurant (south of Lake St.)