

(Rutland Herald article July 2, 2020)

GMP has app to let customers support small biz and nonprofits.

Green Mountain Power kicked off a program Wednesday that will allow customers to share solar credits with small businesses recovering from the loss of income caused by the pandemic.

It joins an enhanced rebate program as ways to decrease fossil fuel use in responsible ways.

Josh Castonguay, a vice president and chief innovation officer at Green Mountain Power, said staff at the utility realized early on as Vermont took steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 that the consequences would be challenging. Steps taken by Gov. Phil Scott included self-quarantine guidelines and the closure of nonessential businesses.

“We were thinking, ‘OK, what are all the things we can do that are either helping out or help customers as they transition, help small businesses as they transition to whatever the new normal is?’ and ‘How can we do that while also continuing to drive de-carbonizing the grid, resilience reliability and saving all of our customers money?’ That was sort of the premise,” he said.

A series of enhanced rebates already is in place and will continue through August.

The rebate on a heat pump has increased to \$800 from \$400; a new rebate is in place on a heat pump water heater of \$200, which can increase to \$600 if combined with an offer from Efficiency Vermont; the rebate on an electric bike has increased to \$300 from \$200; and the rebate on an electric mower was \$50 but is now \$75.

On Wednesday, GMP went live with the Share with Vermont Green app that allows its customers to share solar credits with small businesses and nonprofits.

The app was inspired by an email sent March 20 by Michael Shank, of Brandon.

Shank said he thinks a lot of his friends and neighbors were trying to find ways to help their community recover from the economic fallout of the pandemic response.

“I think everyone in town, in Brandon, (was) exploring every possible avenue to help people in need,” he said.

Shank said he looked at his own resources and realized he had extra solar credits. He wondered if there was a way to share that asset with small businesses and nonprofits.

Castonguay said the solar shares program is a pilot that will last for a little more than a year. He said the innovation team will be watching this summer to see if it needs adjustments or methods to enhance participation.

The timing is good for a program that relies on solar to help customers give back, Castonguay pointed out. There will be “plenty of solar production and businesses are starting to open up,” he said.

“Getting any kind of credit on (a small business’ or nonprofits’) bill will be a help,” Castonguay said.

Shank works for a nonprofit that develops global climate policy which he said has informed his support for GMP.

“I care about utilities that are thinking about renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions and GMP has been on the cutting edge there in thinking about how to transition to 100% renewable energy, how to cut the emissions out of the power supply. I’ve watched them grow and innovate and become more carbon-neutral and green and renewable and that’s been great,” he said.

There are three main goals for a utility and meeting all of them is a challenge, Castonguay said.

“It’s really easy to be not reliable but really cheap or clean non-renewable but not cheap, but it’s hard to do all three, drive down costs, really drive up reliability for customers and drive out carbon every chance we get. That has been this underlying dream for us. Then it developed into, OK, how do we innovate around that? It spawned battery storage programs, heat pump programs, everything just to get customers aware that these opportunities exist,” he said.

In July, GMP will start another program designed to reduce energy use at peak periods and raise money for the Vermont Foodbank.

The GMP website, greenmountainpower.com has more information about taking part in the rebate program or sharing solar credits.

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