

**Taftsville Chapel Plans to Go Solar**

Last week the Taftsville Chapel hosted an evening gathering open to the public to discuss their plans to go solar. Several Taftsville residents and Sally Miller, representing Sustainable Woodstock, attended the meeting.

Adding solar is just part of an intentional environmental stewardship plan envisioned by the chapel congregation, as Heather Wolfe, their creation care liaison, explained to us. “We see caring for and restoring God’s good creation as a way to love God and love our neighbors.” As Heather described it, the green movement is not just a social movement to them, but one of faith as well.

The concept arose during their search for a permanent pastor, a position that has been open for 4 years now, ever since Randy Good—their pastor for 16 years—retired. This transition time provided churchgoers with an opportunity to examine their core values and the Anabaptist roots of Mennonites.

A focus on creation care emerged out of brainstorming ways to live into the congregation’s stated purpose and vision going forward. The process started by examining what churchgoers were doing at home to preserve the environment (recycling for example), then various committees completed a greener congregation stewardship score sheet for all aspects of church life, and from that generating ideas about what additional things could be done as a church community (such as composting) which eventually led to creating a comprehensive creation care plan for the church with specific sustainability goals set for each month.

In August Taftsville Chapel joined the Mennonite Creation Care Network, a network of likeminded communities, and discovered a grant source that would make the addition of solar affordable. They were the first to submit an application and are very optimistic about their chances of obtaining the grant. They should receive word in early December. In the meantime, they have applied for their Certificate of Public Good from the state, and expect to receive that later this year.

If things continue to progress as planned with the project, Catamount Solar would install the panels in the spring, and the congregation envisions capping it off with a community celebration in the spring, perhaps around Earth Day.

The back roof of the chapel, which faces southeast, has the capacity for an 11.66 KW project. This will provide roughly twice what the chapel uses, helping them move closer towards net zero energy and aligning with their core value of generosity by donating the surplus to other area nonprofits. Bethany Birches Camp in Plymouth has already been identified as one recipient, and others will be considered.

Sally Miller asked if the chapel had considered what it would do with the RECs it earned. These are renewable energy credits that can be sold to other entities to offset their use of carbon emitting energy, and brings into question whether the carbon-free energy is still “green”. Heather said they were committed to retiring the RECs, meaning the chapel’s solar power would not be used in this way.

Future energy savings from going solar will allow the chapel to make other energy efficiency upgrades down the road.

On a sad note, interim pastor Dorcas Miller Lehmann attended her last service here that Sunday after serving the congregation for over 9 months, heading back home to friends and family in Pennsylvania. She will be sorely missed by everyone in Taftsville. The search for a new permanent pastor continues.