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Presentation Title: Activating Behavioral Support for Local Solar Development with Community Choice Aggregation

Abstract: As part of a community choice aggregation (CCA) program via the Southeast Ohio Public Energy Council (SOPEC), the City of Athens, Ohio is adding a 0.2 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) carbon fee above the standard electric aggregation rate to fund the development of behind-the-meter solar photovoltaic (PV) installations at high-value, municipally-owned sites. This carbon fee serves as a unique case study on how community engagement and education can help nudge behavioral economic changes to implement a democratically-led fee-for-solar premium as part of a larger, opt-out aggregation program. This fee leverages new capital for financing solar projects, attracting investment and catalyzing project development in an under-resourced region. In exchange for paying this higher premium, customers receive Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs) originating from these specific solar projects that are assigned to their aggregation portfolio. Though SOPEC did not need ballot approval to add the incremental fee to customer utility rates, the agency used a public interest campaign as an opportunity to educate residents about the economic and social damages of carbon emissions via fossil-fuel electricity generation. The fee was approved by a majority vote (76%) in May of 2018 and will be implemented on the June 2020 meter-read date. Moreover, this fee has created additional questions for researchers moving forward, such as exploring if solar deployment for community assets creates more value than individual-customer cost over time, as it adjusts dynamically to customer demand and market forces. This unique finance model may serve as an exemplary approach for other local electric service providers in U.S. states with CCA laws to develop a fund for community-based solar deployment, particularly for those in states without enabling legislation or supportive policy mechanisms for community solar or municipal PV investments.