

MUNICIPAL AGGREGATION



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The Connecticut Statehouse in Hartford.

In Connecticut, municipal aggregation rising as a clean energy priority

Meg Dalton | January 29, 2019

Several groups want lawmakers to follow the lead of neighboring states and adopt community choice aggregation.

Allowing local governments to buy clean power on behalf of residents is emerging as a top legislative priority for Connecticut clean energy advocates.

Community choice aggregation remains an under-the-radar concept in Connecticut even as all of the state's neighbors have already adopted policies. Several groups see it as a potentially important tool for the state's clean energy transition and are working to raise its profile with policymakers.

"There's not much to say, except it's not a thing," said Amy McLean Salls, Connecticut director at the Acadia Center, a nonprofit clean energy research and advocacy group that included community choice aggregation among five recommendations (https://acadiacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Acadia-Center_CTGovernorMemo_2018.pdf) to the state's new governor. "We would like it to be a thing."

More recently, a statewide environmental coalition — which includes organizations like the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, and Solar Connecticut — listed community choice aggregation among its climate and clean energy priorities for 2019.

The small but growing momentum for community choice aggregation in Connecticut comes thanks in large part to the efforts of Peter Millman, a Mansfield resident who has devoted much of his retirement to climate action and clean energy.

"It seems like a tool that's missing from Connecticut's toolbox, and I don't understand why it's not there," Millman said. "I started doing some asking around, and it seemed like very few people knew what it was or had heard of it."

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Millman started small, posting about community choice aggregation on a statewide environmental listserv and bringing it to the attention of targeted individuals and organizations, like the Acadia Center. He's also put together a one-pager that he distributes at environmental summits and to legislators he hopes will introduce a bill during the current legislative session.

"For the most part, it is well-received," he said. "People are curious what it is, and when I tell them more, there's interest in it. It takes a little bit to understand what it is, and like many of the energy issues, when you get stuck digging beneath the surface, it can get complicated."

Millman has also reached out to experts in other states to understand how it was implemented elsewhere, citing the Local Energy Aggregation Network (LEAN) (<http://leanenergyus.org/>) as a go-to tool. "Community aggregation in one state can be very unlike what it is in another state," he said, and it's been helpful for him comparing the different models.

Community choice aggregation resembles a buyer's club, like the kind used by Costco. Enacted through state legislation, the programs (<https://www.epa.gov/greenpower/community-choice-aggregation>) allow municipal governments to combine the electricity load of residents and businesses in order to purchase clean electricity on behalf of customers. Typically, residents have the option to opt out.

"Aggregation enables that communities have full jurisdiction over the power they procure," said Shawn Marshall, LEAN's co-founder and executive director. Through community choice aggregation, communities are able to reduce costs for residents, as well as seek out cleaner, more efficient forms of energy.

With the exception of New York, all eight states currently authorizing community choice aggregation did so through legislation. Connecticut's neighbors, including New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Jersey, all allow community choice aggregation. In Massachusetts, almost 150 of the state's 351 municipalities (<https://energynews.us/2019/01/24/northeast/massachusetts-city-hopes-to-reinvest-energy-savings-into-more-energy-savings/>) have enacted some form of community aggregation.

Related: [This Massachusetts city hopes to reinvest energy savings into more energy savings](https://energynews.us/2019/01/24/northeast/massachusetts-city-hopes-to-reinvest-energy-savings-into-more-energy-savings/)
(<https://energynews.us/2019/01/24/northeast/massachusetts-city-hopes-to-reinvest-energy-savings-into-more-energy-savings/>)

Environmental activist Adam Wood, who has been working closely with Millman, points to Newton, Massachusetts (<http://newton.wickedlocal.com/news/20180402/newton-power-choice-plan-moves-forward>), as a model for how the approach could be deployed in Connecticut. The town recently signed a contract where ratepayers would purchase 60 percent of their electricity from renewable sources while reducing the cost by about \$0.02 per kilowatt-hour.

Wood also cited New York's [Westchester Power](https://www.westchesterpower.org/) (<https://www.westchesterpower.org/>), a program of Sustainable Westchester that was tasked with deploying the first community aggregation program under Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Reforming the Energy Vision plan in 2015. Westchester Power allowed participating municipalities (21 in total) to pool their resources to purchase power at lower rates and also from 100 percent clean energy sources.

The first of its kind in New York, the program was renewed in late 2018 (<https://westfaironline.com/109806/state-plugs-in-westchester-community-choice-aggregation-power-program-for-round-two/>) by the New York Public Service Commission, which allows Westchester Power to move forward with a second round of power-buying contracts. In its first phase, the participating

municipalities signed a power-buying agreement for two years, resulting in two contracts — the first for residents and businesses serviced by Consolidated Edison Inc., and the second for those in New York State Electric and Gas Corp's territory.

Wood said a similar model would be effective in Connecticut. He said the key is to promote a mix of renewable energy sources, reduce costs, and provide opt-out provisions.

The biggest barrier has been legislative inaction. Connecticut can't move forward with aggregation deals until it is established by law. It hasn't been on the radar of the state's General Assembly until very recently. Late last week, a coalition of legislators put forward [a proposed bill \(https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/TOB/h/pdf/2019HB-06241-R00-HB.PDF\)](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/TOB/h/pdf/2019HB-06241-R00-HB.PDF) to the Energy and Technology Committee that would create a program to allow municipalities to purchase power on behalf of their residents.

Another barrier has been education — something Millman has been chipping away at. Compared with offshore wind, for example, he says community choice aggregation is difficult to comprehend.

"How do we speak about something that's complicated in a simple way?" he said.

And the concept has to compete for attention with other clean energy priorities, like offshore wind advocacy and energy efficiency programs.

"All of these are really important and probably more important than community choice at this point," Millman said. "It's taken a backseat."

Still, he's hopeful that, if done right, community aggregation could be a powerful tool for Connecticut in reaching its climate action goals. "This is a good time to think about more broadly and ambitiously about where Connecticut should go next with its energy policy."
