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The Times Union (Albany, New York)

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## Utility's solar capacity to grow; State bows to vendors, community group, in forcing Central Hudson to expand

**BYLINE:** By LARRY RULISON Business writer**SECTION:** BUSINESS; Pg. B8**LENGTH:** 532 words

ALBANY - State regulators are forcing Central Hudson Gas & Electric to expand its residential solar electric program because of increasing demand in the utility's service territory for the systems.

Poughkeepsie-based Central Hudson serves 37,000 customers in Albany, Columbia and Greene counties.

Through a process called net metering, in which customers connect their solar panels and meter to the electrical grid, residential customers can generate electricity to meet their own needs at home. Any extra power they make is sold to their utility.

The state Public Service Commission requires that New York utilities allow customers to establish net metering solar systems, but has issued ceilings for each utility on the amount of solar generation it has to accept.

Under a formula set by the PSC that puts the ceiling at 0.1 percent of each utility's 1996 peak electrical demand, Central Hudson was initially required to allow up to 800 kilowatts of solar systems. A typical home system is usually between 1 kilowatt and 4 kilowatts.

In December, Central Hudson voluntarily raised its net metering ceiling to 1.2 megawatts, an increase of 50 percent. It was the first time a utility had asked the PSC if it could raise its solar generation capacity.

But two groups petitioned in April to increase the capacity.

New York Solar Energy Industries Association, a trade group, and the Kingston-based community development group **Sustainable Hudson Valley**, petitioned the PSC to increase Central Hudson's net metering ceiling to 3 megawatts.

Central Hudson opposed the increase, saying it has to absorb costs associated with net metering that it cannot recover. Utility spokesman John Maserjian said that includes administrative costs to certify systems and revenue lost when people generate their own electricity.

"We had indicated that the net metering program should be looked at again, so utilities can recover the costs they

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incur in the program," he said.

Central Hudson has 166 net metered solar systems totaling 944 kilowatts attached to its system, but another 54 systems totaling 344 kilowatts are pending installation. That's a total of nearly 1.3 megawatts.

The PSC's board voted June 20 to increase Central Hudson's ceiling to 1.8 megawatts, and ordered Central Hudson to file a report by Aug. 1 that details how much revenue it will lose if the ceiling is raised to 3 megawatts. After that, the PSC may consider raising it again.

Christine Donovan, executive vice president of the New York Solar Energy Industries Association, said she was pleased the ceiling was raised. But it will only allow installations in Central Hudson's territory - which includes 470,000 customers from suburban New York City to southern Albany County - until the end of the year, she said.

Residential customers are typically hesitant to buy a solar system, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, without the ability to sell the power back to the utility. Donovan hopes the PSC increases the ceiling again.

"It certainly would be a shame for any utility in New York state to be turning away willing solar electric customers," she said.

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**COMPANY:** CENTRAL HUDSON GAS & ELECTRIC CORP (94%); HUDSON VALLEY HOMESTEAD (54%)

**ORGANIZATION:** SOLAR ENERGY INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION (54%)

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## Small businesses seek strength amid giants; Planned event will explore creating local merchants chapter to compete with chains

**BYLINE:** By ALAN WECHSLER Business writer

**SECTION:** BUSINESS; Pg. E1

**LENGTH:** 391 words

TROY - Worried about the impact of chain stores? A group of local health-food merchants and small-business advocates wants to help.

The Sanctuary for Independent Media in Troy will hold a dinner, vendor fair and presentation to explore creating a local chapter of The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, or BALLE. That's a national organization based in San Francisco that encourages shopping at locally owned businesses over chains, especially those that come in big boxes.

Sponsors include The Honest Weight Food Co-op in Albany, the Capital District Community Loan Fund and **Sustainable Hudson Valley**.

Please see CO-OP E3 "Our buying dollar is power," said Karisa Centanni, education coordinator at the co-op. "We can refocus that."

A local chapter of BALLE would be used as an alliance of locally owned businesses. It would offer networking opportunities, the sharing of business skills and also help run promotional campaigns about the benefits of shopping locally, she said.

Businesses that plan to attend include Daily Grind, a coffee shop in Albany and Troy, and A. DeFazio's Imports and Pizzeria, a Troy-based business that is expanding its organic food product line.

Centanni said she'd like to see more store owners participate.

"Our goal is to try to get the backbone of the community," she said.

Rocco DeFazio, owner of the import business, said he was mainly going for the contacts, and wasn't so much interested in fighting big-box stores.

"I'm just supporting local growers," he said.

BALLE is a 5-year-old organization that has 37 chapters, from Philadelphia to Bellingham, Wash., statewide in Vermont and Utah, and in other areas. Founded in Philadelphia and based in San Francisco, the program is growing

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steadily, said program manager Ann Bartz.

"Our organization has doubled in the last year," she said. "I think there's a growing consciousness in the whole country." The organization currently has 12,000 members.

The Troy event includes a presentation by Michael Shuman, author of the book "The Small Mart Revolution: How Local Businesses are Beating the Global Competition." It begins at 5:30 p.m. Nov. 28 at the sanctuary, at 3361 Sixth Ave. in Troy. For more information, call 272-2390 or visit <http://www.thesanctuaryforindependentmedia.org>.

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