

## Swimming Along with SWIM: A Progress Report on Community Energy in Santa Cruz

Some of our readers may recall the proposal developed by SSRF to build a solar plus storage microgrid on the West side of Santa Cruz ([the Santa Cruz Westside Microblock, aka, SWIM](#)). Since the release of that policy brief in September, we have been talking to and meeting with a broad range of solar activists, organizations, policymakers, businesses and others in order to better understand the regulatory environment in California, the technical issues related to designing the system and the financial requirements for building SWIM. Many reviewers of the SWIM proposals have responded favorably to the concept and urged us to continue to pursue the project.

Our thinking about the breadth and reach of the project has evolved from a single microgrid serving the area around the SSRF office in the University Business Park (the old Wrigley Building) to developing two other systems, the first a microgrid serving a proposed housing development not far from SWIM, the second a solar carport project serving the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and the adjacent low-income Beach Flats neighborhood. These systems would be linked by an underground transmission conduit along the [City of Santa Cruz Coastal Rail Trail right-of-way](#).

Here are a few things we have learned through our research:

- At the moment, the prospects for grid-connected distributed energy resources (DERs) are limited, unless the owner of the transmission and distribution system holds a major stake in the project.
- It might be a better bet not to design for export of power into the grid but expand the services offered by the microgrid to customers (e.g., EV charging; building energy services).
- A successful community energy system must be supported by the public and offer it benefits not otherwise available from existing power providers.
- There are a number of potential financing options, including both for- and non-profit funders.
- We need to enlist building owners in the project and develop the system design in order to proceed further.

Over the next couple of months, the SSRF will also be exploring alternative organizational structures to push the project forward, including the creation of a [member-owned community energy cooperative](#), in collaboration with a number of partners and collaborators. If you'd like to learn more about SWIM and its progress, please contact Ronnie Lipschutz at [rlipsch@ucsc.edu](mailto:rlipsch@ucsc.edu).