

LOCAL NEWS

SE Pa. counties tackle energy needs with coordinated buying

Chester, Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery formed Sustainable Energy Partnership of Southeast PA



Four area counties have formed a partnership for renewable energy purchasing.
(MediaNews Group File Photo)

Electricity doesn't come cheap these days, but in suburban Philadelphia it will now come at a lower rate for a consortium of county governments.

Four ring counties that formed the Sustainable Energy Partnership of Southeast PA (SEP) have made the first major step in purchasing low cost, stable and transparent electricity for government operations. As members of the SEP, Chester, Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery counties have started receiving electricity through wholesale market purchasing.

In August, the SEP's Energy Board, formed to govern the group's purchasing program, adopted the renewable energy purchasing strategy that sets an overall goal: By 2035, all four counties will purchase 100 percent of their operations' electricity from renewable sources. The strategy specifies interim targets of 25% by 2026, 75% by 2030, and 90% by 2032.

The SEP renewable energy strategy also contains guidelines for future power purchase agreements, such as sourcing energy from diversified generation sources, prioritizing projects within the Delaware Valley, and prioritizing new projects under development (as opposed to existing energy generation facilities) to more directly contribute to the development of clean energy projects.

Through the SEP, the counties will also have improved access to and purchasing power for procuring renewable energy and will be able to onboard additional public entities to the partnership over time.

Before the establishment of SEP, all four counties purchased Green-E Renewable Energy Credits to offset each megawatt hour of conventional energy purchased.

SEP Energy Board Vice Chairwoman Julie Bookheimer, who serves as Chester County's chief financial officer, said, "Meeting the goal of 100% renewable electricity will involve supplementing those renewable energy credits with procurement of energy from local (mid-Atlantic) solar, wind, and hydroelectric projects, as well as on-site renewable energy at county facilities, and other strategic projects and partnerships."

With the support of its electricity supplier, WGLES, and its energy consultant, EnelX, SEP is currently exploring renewable energy projects with which the counties could consider a power purchase agreement or lead the development of a new energy project using federal incentives.

In December 2024, the SEP Board adopted guidelines to enable the addition of new members, including municipalities, public school systems, and municipal authorities.

"Adding new public members that have similar goals of transitioning to renewable energy will amplify the SEP's purchasing power and impact, to the benefit of all," added Bookheimer.