

BEST PRACTICES

- State and Local Solar Incentives
- No-cost Site Lease
- Utility Incentives

Project Name:

SAND CREEK APARTMENTS

Reduced energy costs from solar on carports, and a community building benefit LMI and farmworkers in San Joaquin Valley

Size: 138.6 KW_{DC}

Location:

41020 Road 124, Orosi, CA 93647

of LMI customers:

60

Project Website:

<https://www.selfhelpenterprises.org/blog/newsandevents/she-and-sunrun-celebrate-the-completion-of-a-new-solar-installation-at-sand-creek-apartments-in-orosi/>



Overview

The Sand Creek Apartments are a Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) housing development located in Orosi, California. The San Joaquin Valley is a major agricultural district, producing about \$3 billion in crops in 2020. Multigenerational farm worker families shoulder a disproportionate energy burden, and often have to resort to overcrowded or illegal rental accommodations. The apartments – built in 2006 – provide 60, two-to-four-bedroom units. Energized in August of 2021, the solar installation includes rooftop solar arrays on fifteen carports and a community building. Each carport has around 25 panels, with a capacity between 9-10 KWDC per carport. The separate community building's array has a capacity of 12.2 KWDC.

The Sand Creek Apartments are owned by [Self-Help Enterprises](#) (SHE). SHE is a leading community development organization who works with LMI families to build and sustain healthy homes and communities. SHE is a pioneer of mutual self-help housing, a federal program that combines “sweat equity” home ownership opportunities with technical assistance and affordable loans.

SHE partnered with [Sunrun](#) to complete the solar installation. In 2019, Sunrun was the largest residential solar installer in the U.S. and generated a total revenue of over \$2 billion in 2022. The Sand Creek Apartments was the first project between Sunrun and SHE that took advantage of [Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing](#) (SOMAH) incentives. The SOMAH project is a massive California program that provides up to \$100 million annually in financial incentives for installing solar energy systems on multifamily affordable housing, and for creating jobs. Sunrun has made a commitment to implement 100 MW



of solar on affordable multifamily housing via the SOMAH program by 2030.

The Sand Creek Apartments are 100% dedicated to LMI, and half of the sixty units are designated exclusively for farmworkers and their families. The maximum rent charged is based on the [Area Median Income](#) (AMI). All of the solar production bill credits from the carport arrays are allocated to the residents, saving roughly \$50/month. An allocation method using unit size determines the percentage of bill credits issued to each unit. The solar production from the community building is allocated to common areas. The energy produced by the solar installations' offsets electricity loads by up to 90%. The community building provides a book nook, periodic programs including topics such as digital literacy training, GED, and continuing education programs, after school support and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Before installation, in order to fulfill SOMAH requirements, SHE conducted resident education

covering the benefits of solar generation, what to expect during the installation process, and energy conservation tips. The education can include paid job training. A resident and a student from a local job training partner (located in Visalia) were trained and paid to assist with the installation.

The total cost for the community building's solar array was \$38,056, and the [California Solar Initiative's Multifamily Affordable Solar Housing](#) (MASH) program provided \$12,086 towards the project costs. SHE owns the community building solar array. The carport's arrays are owned by Sunrun. Both SHE and Sunrun entered into a Solar Services Agreement (SSA) – a contract to purchase solar energy from the owner of a system. Sunrun pays for the installation, and SHE pays for the generated power. SOMAH provided \$267,690 towards the total carport array project cost of \$454,200.



Innovative Approaches

- The Sand Creek Apartments were the **first SHE property to complete a SOMAH-funded photovoltaic system installation.**
- **Tenants receive 100% of the benefit** from the installation, in support of SHE's mission to build and sustain healthy homes and communities.
- **Mutual self-help housing** is an innovative model for providing LMI housing.

Lessons Learned

- SHE learned that close involvement in the project was helpful since the project was a retrofit of existing infrastructure. Items such as determining the location of the interconnection equipment, site trenching, and tree removal to mitigate shading needed to be addressed. After construction was completed, the owner needed to ensure that the carports and landscaping were intact, and other impacts were addressed..



This case study is a part of the LIFT Toolkit initiative. To explore more case studies and best practices visit LIFT.Groundswell.org
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