



“Clean Energy in Michigan” Series, Number 7

Brownfield Developments

O’Shea Solar Park – Detroit

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The following case study is one of several produced recently by a *Dow Sustainability Fellows* project team. The team highlighted brownfields and blighted sites in Michigan that have been developed or are being considered for solar projects. Each of these case studies examines the technical, economic, social, and other relevant characteristics of a specific project.

- Access the full report, *Accelerating Solar Development on Michigan Brownfields: Challenges and Pathways Forward*.

Background

This project is a 2.44 MW installation located in O’Shea Park in the Grandale neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan. While not formerly a brownfield, the formerly blighted site is a 20-acre park housing a 9.6-acre project that will produce enough electricity to power roughly 450 homes.¹ The project was commissioned in July 2017.

The project was developed by DTE in partnership with the City of Detroit. DTE relocated 2 MW of their 50 ME Lapeer, Michigan, solar project to Detroit after talks with the City’s mayor.

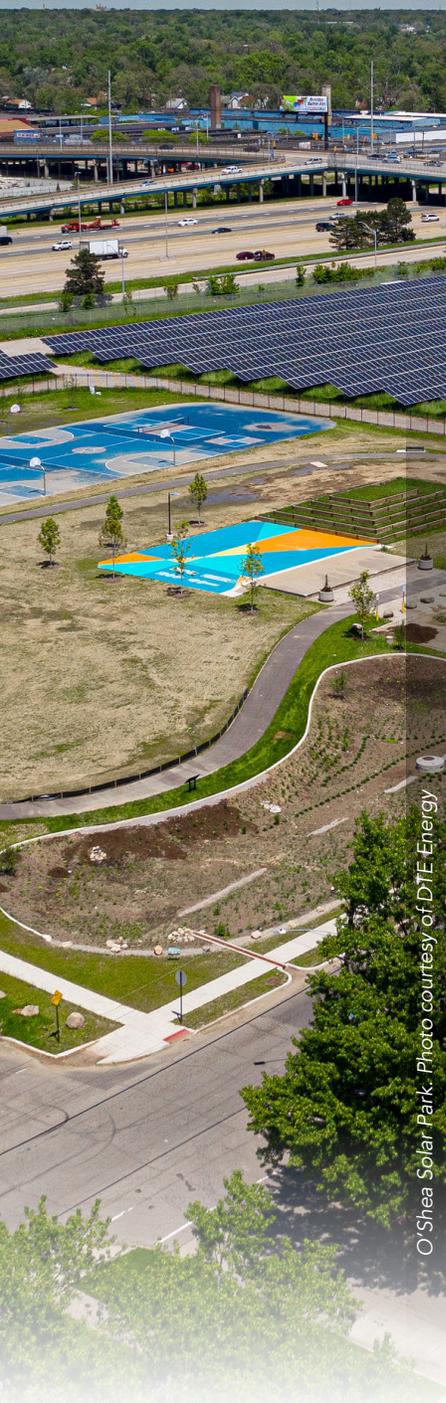
Financing

It is estimated that the City of Detroit will benefit from approximately \$1.4 million in added tax revenue over the 20-year lease.² DTE Customers will see no cost reduction on their utility bills. Notably, O’Shea’s solar energy goes to the general grid, not explicitly to local DTE consumers.

The city also received a one-time \$25,000 lease payment from DTE, which was directed toward beautification of a separate piece of the 20-acre O’Shea site. Additionally, DTE agreed to maintain a portion of the city property around the 10-acre solar array. The value of the maintenance, which otherwise would be the city’s responsibility, is estimated at \$400,000 over the life of the lease.³

Key Success Variables

O’Shea Solar Park demonstrates the importance of early and intentional community engagement. It was successful because project leadership and partners rose to the occasion after an initial oversight in planning. Responding to community resistance by identifying a local community leader to run council meetings instead of a planner was important; local voices inspire confidence. The development of community spaces and nature within the park and the investment in local green jobs was also positive.



O’Shea Solar Park. Photo courtesy of DTE Energy



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The *Clean Energy in Michigan* series provides case studies and fact sheets answering common questions about clean energy projects in Michigan.

Find this document and more about the project online at graham.umich.edu/climate-energy/energy-futures.

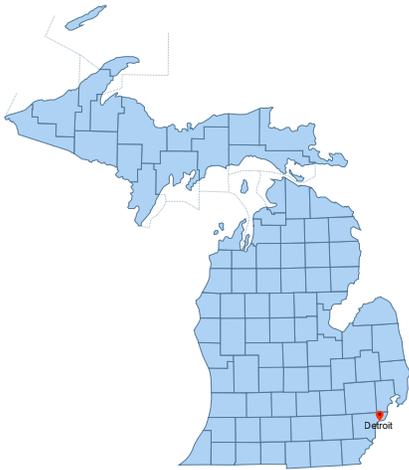
Lessons and Takeaways

After selecting O’Shea Park as the site, DTE and Detroit leadership pitched the solar park to the community as only a solar energy development. The community was informed after the project was proposed and agreements already had been signed to develop in their local park. The Detroit City Council had to vote to approve the project’s 20-year lease to DTE.

The community was not receptive. The Grandale community was not going to receive cheaper electricity, nor would their bills automatically be “greener,” and their beloved community center was being torn down. The decommissioned O’Shea Park Community Center represented one of the last institutional establishments in the area and had been their hub for generations, and many hoped that it could be restored for future generations. City leadership did not see a payoff for rebuilding it, and planned to tear it down. DTE and the Mayor’s administration were taking a huge part of Grandale’s park, for little in return.

In response, the City and DTE held public meetings to identify community priorities for the solar project. Detroit-based DTE contractor, Walker-Miller Energy Services, provided home energy efficiency audits and upgrades to over 100 local families⁵ as part of two existing DTE programs: Home Energy Consultation and Energy Efficiency Assistance (EEA is specifically for low-income households). Also, during the O’Shea Solar Park construction, J. Ranck Electric partnered with a pre-apprentice job-training/placement program, “to put Grandale and surrounding neighborhood residents to work. For the majority of the project, nearly 40 percent of the electrical apprentice labor was from the park’s surrounding neighborhoods.”⁶

DTE now manages an urban pollinator garden with native plants between solar arrays, which attracts native insects and animals. The remaining non-solar-panel area of O’Shea Park has a few acres of land that were enhanced with, “new walking paths, resurfaced basketball courts, play fields and community gathering space with seating, new trees and native flower beds”.⁷ To honor the old community center, its foundation was painted, and a brick platform remains for the community to use as a stage within O’Shea Park. The site also includes an “educational component [that] will be developed to help kids learn more about solar energy.”⁸ Detroit Water and Sewer Department created a bioretention garden with native plants within the park to manage stormwater and reduce flooding in the area.⁹ This work was funded by the lease payment from DTE and more than \$350,000 secured by the city, largely from philanthropic foundations and the federal government.



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O'SHEA SOLAR INITIATIVE
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

- 1 J. Rank Electric, Inc. “O’Shea Park Urban Solar Farm,” n.d., accessed 2019. <https://www.jranck.com/project/oshea-park-urban-solar-farm-detroit-mi/>.
- 2 Joe Guillen. “DTE plans 10-acre solar array in Detroit.” Detroit Free Press, 2016.
- 3 Joe Guillen. “DTE plans 10-acre solar array in Detroit.” Detroit Free Press, 2016.
- 4 Image credit: Detroit Collaborative Design Center
- 5 David Lingholm. “O’Shea solar project creates opportunities, engages community.” DTE Energy, 2016. <https://empoweringmichigan.com/oshea-solar-project-creates-opportunities-engages-community/>.
- 6 J. Rank Electric, Inc. “O’Shea Park Urban Solar Farm,” n.d., accessed 2019.
- 7 Planning and Development Department. “O’Shea Solar Park.” City of Detroit, 2019. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/planning-and-development-department/west-design-region/oshea-solar-park>.
- 8 David Lingholm. “O’Shea solar project creates opportunities, engages community.” DTE Energy, 2016.
- 9 Planning and Development Department. “O’Shea Solar Park.” City of Detroit, 2019.