

Nonprofit's solar project generates \$100,000 grant

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Flanked by a solar electric panel, Community Development Partnership executive director Elizabeth Bridgewater thanks a group at the TD Bank in Harwich Port. The organization won a \$100,000 grant from TD Bank Charitable Foundation to install solar panels on housing units. Cape Cod Times/Steve Heaslip

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HARWICH PORT — An idea by an Eastham nonprofit that will save energy and recycle money through the Cape's economy turned out to be worth \$100,000.

The Community Development Partnership is one of only 25 nonprofits from Maine to Florida to win a \$100,000 affordable housing grant through the TD Charitable Foundation's "Housing for Everyone" grant competition.

The CDP's idea — using solar panels to generate electricity and money — also may be a model for other nonprofits, as well as towns and state agencies searching for a way to lower energy expenses and to pay for badly needed affordable housing maintenance, according to officials at a ceremony Friday.

"This is an example of what can be done when all the community players come together and understand the needs of a community," state Sen. Dan Wolf, D-Harwich, said at the event, joined by state Rep. Sarah Peake, D-Provincetown.

The grant-winning idea, called the Real Return Initiative, is "a home-grown, in-house fuel assistance program," CDP Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater said Friday, accepting the grant from TD Bank's regional director, Peter Rice.

The \$559,427 project is expected to start in early March when CDP installs solar panels on five of its affordable housing buildings that have south-facing roofs. The panels are expected to cost about \$269,000.

The panels will help cut electricity bills, saving a minimum of \$25 a month for all renters in 47 of its 58 affordable housing units at 10 sites around the Lower Cape and its own offices. (The rest of the renters — at Thankful Chases Pathway in Harwich — already have new, energy-efficient homes.)

The unconventional part of the project is CDP's use of the solar panels as a guaranteed source of revenue to help finance \$280,000 in repairs and energy-saving projects in its 10 rental buildings, such as adding insulation, new heating and hot water systems and energy-efficient appliances.

The revenue comes from solar renewable energy credits, generated by the panels' electricity, that energy suppliers are required to buy under the 2008 Massachusetts Green Communities Act.

The sale of the credits to other businesses and nonprofits should generate \$18,612 to \$34,327 a year.

"This is a way to use our properties to produce a brand new source of revenue," Bridgewater said earlier this week. "We have additional needs, but we ran out of (suitable) roof space."

The revenue from the credits, the TD grant, other donations, reserves and mortgages are helping to finance a commercial bank loan to help pay for the construction work. The work sites benefitting from solar panels and upgrades include the eight-unit Little Homesteads project in Harwich, the four-unit Robert Lane development in Harwich, four units at Harry Kemp Way, two units at Nelson Way in Provincetown and 12 units at Fred Bell Way in Wellfleet.

The next phase, Bridgewater said, is to expand by using the roofs of private homeowners, who want to make a contribution to help their community's housing needs.

"We've already talked to a few philanthropically minded homeowners who would let us use their roof space," she said.

Bridgewater credited CDP's Abigail Chapman, director of construction and energy efficiency programs, for the grant-winning idea, fleshed out with help of CDP treasurer Joe Bayne, solar panel installer Jason Stoots of Hyannis and TD Bank commercial lender Heather Brown Kotel.