

Community Sustainability Partners: Scaling District-Wide Infrastructure

Building a Clean Energy Investment Pipeline in Tompkins County, NY

AT A GLANCE

Investment Priorities

District-Scale Geothermal Heating, Solar Microgrids, and Building Decarbonization

Key Partners

Community Sustainability Partners, Tompkins County, City of Ithaca, and Cornell University

Community Impacts

Modeled potential production of 5,049 MWh and 534 metric tons of GHG emissions reductions annually across the solar project pipeline.

Strategic Role

Market Builder / Project Originator / Fund Sponsor

The Path Forward

Seeking targeted predevelopment grants and loan financing to transform district-scale energy concepts into shovel-ready investments.

THE BIG PICTURE

Community Sustainability Partners, in collaboration with Tompkins County and the City of Ithaca, is acting as a regional engine for sustainable infrastructure investment. Through the Tompkins-Ithaca District Scale Impact Fund, this partnership addresses the critical gap between ambitious energy targets and implementable, large-scale projects. The initiative builds off of a strong local and state policy environment, driving demand for clean energy solutions while prioritizing affordability and local economic growth in low-income and disadvantaged communities (LIDACs). By standardizing predevelopment workflows and providing necessary capital for feasibility studies, interconnection analysis, and engineering design, the fund reduces transaction costs for multi-building and district-wide energy networks.

The Challenge: District-scale clean energy projects routinely stall between planning and construction because essential infrastructure remains stranded without predevelopment capital.

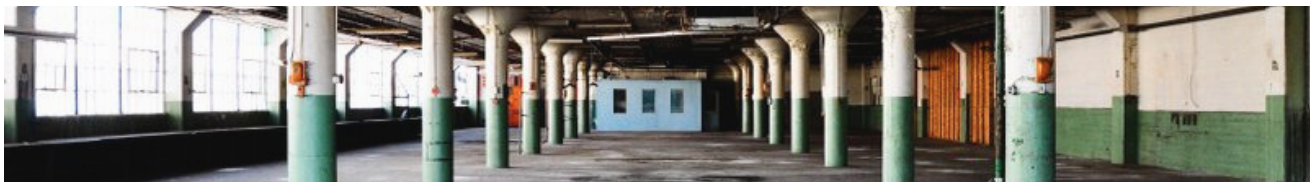
The Solution: Creating a centralized impact fund to finance the technical evaluation and design of thermal energy networks and clean energy deployment, making them highly attractive to conventional financing and institutional investors.



SouthWorks Ithaca Gateway

CREATING THE FOUNDATION

As a direct result of work supported by the Municipal Investment Fund (MIF), Community Sustainability Partners and the City of Ithaca are establishing a comprehensive framework to accelerate infrastructure-scale clean energy deployment. By leveraging technical expertise from Cornell University's Environmental Systems Lab, the partnership is developing digital twin modeling of building energy use to map pathways toward decarbonization across the county. This technical foundation reduces the initial risk and soft costs for property owners and developers, ensuring that complex district-scale energy networks and municipal solar portfolios meet the rigorous due diligence requirements necessary to secure private capital and federal tax incentives.



Morse Chain, Emerson Factory, Existing Conditions

FEEDING THE PIPELINE

Supported by the Municipal Investment Fund (MIF), the Tompkins-Ithaca initiative has conducted extensive stakeholder interviews and technical analysis to identify a robust pipeline of 20 high-impact projects. By actively coordinating with major institutional property owners like Ithaca College and Cornell University, as well as affordable housing developers, the fund aggregates localized energy needs into a visible, bankable portfolio. This structured origination strategy allows the region to prioritize investments that directly benefit critically impacted communities, moving from one-off retrofits to coordinated, district-scale infrastructure upgrades that attract institutional-grade investment.



SouthWorks Aerial Image

EARLY SUCCESS

Southworks Microgrid & Geothermal Network: A comprehensive site-wide energy system featuring substation consolidation, onsite solar, battery storage, and hydrogen energy storage platforms.

- **Revenue Streams:** Projected energy savings, grid services, and on-site EV charging revenues.
- **Investment Readiness:** Advanced Predevelopment.
- **Timeline:** Project engineering and site modeling are currently underway.

Cornell University Residential District Thermal Project: The innovative exploration of geothermal heating for district campus buildings to eliminate the use of fossil fuels for heating and domestic hot water.

- **Revenue Streams:** Significant reduction in campus operational and utility expenditures.
- **Investment Readiness:** Market-Scale Feasibility.
- **Timeline:** Feasibility study completed; advancing to full technical exploratory design.

Compass Redevelopment Phase III: The installation of a ground-mounted solar array and distributed energy resources (DER/storage) to provide a resilient energy source for a 151-pad manufactured home community.

- **Revenue Streams:** Direct reduction in household utility costs for residents.
- **Investment Readiness:** Advanced Predevelopment.

"This investment will help the City of Ithaca continue to lead on turning ambitious policy into tangible, on-the-ground projects that improve the quality of life for our residents by driving down costs, creating jobs, and ensuring our community has clean air and clean water."

— Robert G. Cantelmo, Mayor, City of Ithaca

IMPACT & NEXT STEPS

The Tompkins-Ithaca District Scale Impact Fund is demonstrating how targeted predevelopment support can unlock millions in private capital that currently bypasses complex energy infrastructure. By focusing on projects like the Compass Redevelopment—which secures reliable, low-cost power for a low-income manufactured home community—the initiative proves that modern energy solutions are essential for local economic resilience. These projects provide more than just emissions reductions; they stabilize utility costs and insulate vulnerable residents from the volatility of traditional fuel markets.

This case study was funded through the Municipal Investment Fund (MIF) to support local governments and their partner not-for-profit organizations in developing public-private partnership plans that accelerate the deployment of capital to energy and infrastructure projects.

