Moore Village Mutual Housing Community now has solar panels.

Solar panels at Twin Pines Mutual Housing Community will help residents with utility costs.

Photos courtesy of Rachel Iskow.

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

Mutual Housing adding solar to all Davis communities

Teaming with Pacific Gas & Electric, Mutual Housing California is installing solar energy systems at four of its Davis communities. The photovoltaic panels will take stress off the local utility power supply and will have less of a negative impact on the environment.

"Basically, we are putting in four mini-power plants to fortify the grid in the area," said Scott Sarem, chief executive officer of Everyday Energy, which is installing the panels. "We're creating a more robust utility system."

Because it is cheaper to build photovoltaic systems than to build additional power plants to keep up with electric demand, the California Solar Initiative Program allotted nearly $217 million for solar installations in residences and multifamily housing.

Pacific Gas & Electric is administering more than $47 million in funds for 50 low-income, multifamily projects statewide, according to a news release.

In addition to Mutual Housing's four existing Davis properties that are going solar, Mutual Housing recently developed a fifth multifamily community in Davis, New Harmony Mutual Housing that has 780 solar panels on the roof.

As such, New Harmony Mutual Housing is thought to be the largest, privately-owned photovoltaic system in Davis.

"Based on information we have, city staff believes that New Harmony has the largest multifamily photovoltaic system in Davis," said Foster.

The West Village project on the UC Davis campus was not included in the comparison because it is not in the city limits, but the county.

"It makes good sense for Mutual Housing properties in Davis to go solar," said Mutual Housing Chief Executive Officer Rachel Iskow in a statement. "The Davis community, the Mayor and City Council have a strong 'green' orientation, a value that mutual housing leaders share."

Davis is a leader in solar energy with rooftop panels on residence halls at the University of California, the Davis Food Co-op and other buildings in the city and surrounding county.

Based on their permit records from 2003 - 2013, as of July the community produces about 4.6 megawatts of energy at about 790 sites. In addition, the city itself produces another 1 Mw at city facilities.

"We believe that Davis has one of the highest concentrations of photovoltaic systems of any city in the state," said Danielle Foster, City of Davis Housing and Human Services Superintendent.

The New Harmony system has an annual estimated energy production of 307,133 kWh, which means it will offset about 79% of the entire property's electrical energy consumption.

By generating their own electricity, the new systems save residents much-needed money.

"It makes such a difference for residents like low-wage workers, seniors and the disabled to save money on utility bills as they are harder hit by energy costs than people with more money," said Iskow.

"When residents save money on utilities, families have more in their wallets each month for other essentials," agreed Iskow.

Because Mutual Housing keeps rents low at all their properties and rarely increases them, residents receive the maximum benefit of solar energy production.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops and operates well-designed rental housing for the diversity of the region's households. The communities have 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through Mutual Housing's focus on leadership, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, community-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.