

SSAFE Newsletter

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment

A Member-Supported Organization



In This Issue

A SSAFE Presence at LeadingAge



Small, economical solar panels fit easily on a balcony.

What is Plug-in Solar?

By Jean Lofy, RoseVilla

Energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. What can a person do? One option that may be available soon is called plug-in solar, also known as “balcony solar” in Europe.

A typical rooftop solar installation like those at many of our SSAFE chapters is great, but it requires significant upfront financial investment and time spent on permits and utility agreements.

Plug-in solar works differently. These small solar systems plug into a home's power system, sending power into the home for use elsewhere. They can also plug directly into a

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Resiliency Planning

How prepared are you for tomorrow's emergencies?

No Gas – No Noise

The era of electric lawn equipment has arrived.

Interested in learning more?

Visit [SSAFE.org](https://ssafe.org) online or email us at info@ssafe.org

SSAFE newsletters can always be found at [SSAFE.org/newsletter](https://ssafe.org/newsletter)

Plug-in Solar (cont'd)

battery. Many people in Germany, for example, can go to their local box store (like IKEA), buy one, and install it without having to get approval from the local utility. Once home, these panels can be placed anywhere that gets sun, such as on a balcony or patio, or in the backyard.

What's the catch for using these in the U.S.? In order for a household to install plug-in solar systems without a utility agreement and associated fees, each state needs to pass a law to allow this type of small-scale solar, typically capped at 1200 watts. In 2025, Utah was the first state to do so.

Utah's law requires that plug-in solar systems be UL certified. While there aren't any products on the market with that certification yet, it's expected that products will be available in a matter of months.

“...each state needs to pass a law to allow this type of small-scale solar...”

In 2026, many states are considering similar legislation. Approximately 33 states (plus Washington, D.C.) introduced bills fairly similar to Utah's, and five have recently passed them. The governors of Maine, Virginia, Colorado, Maryland, and Connecticut have signed bills into law. All SSAFE chapters are in states that have either passed or proposed legislation.

Germany enacted plug-in solar legislation in 2019 and has had no safety issues.



*A solar panel kit on a balcony in Germany.
Photo by Marco Verch.*

However, their wattage limit is 800 compared to 1200 for Utah, and European residential electrical systems differ somewhat from those in America. One million German households have registered units, but it estimated that as many as four million have them. That's almost 10% of all German households. A basic unit sells for €300-€400 (about \$350-\$470) at IKEA in Germany.

A 1200W unit would cost about \$2,200 in the U.S., but prices are expected to drop as adoption increases. Depending on your electricity rates and sunlight, a plug-in solar system could reduce your electricity costs by an estimated 5-20%. When paired with a battery, it provides electricity for critical devices when the power goes out.

Working towards carbon neutrality by 2050 (part of the SSAFE mission) will require us to explore many strategies. We know that larger rooftop solar arrays are preferred, but for 70% of U.S. households or communities that can't afford rooftop solar or where rooftop solar is otherwise not feasible, plug-in solar could be an

cont'd p.3

Plug-in Solar (cont'd)

alternative. If approved, retirement communities would need to develop specific guidelines for their buildings.

"...a plug-in solar system could reduce your electricity costs by an estimated 5-20%"

Plug-in solar could be good for your pocketbook (lower electricity bills), good for your soul (feeling empowered during a power outage), good for your conscience (reducing reliance on Big Oil), and good for your community (making solar feel more mainstream and less “alternative”). Watch the news for more states adopting this.

For more information:

In most states, **Third Act** has a working group that is trying to advance plug-in solar legislation. Please check your state Third Act website for the latest information.

To track legislation and check your state, consult the **Plug-In Solar Guide** (<https://pluginsolarguide.com/>).

If you want to learn more about the engineering in a readable format, see “What States Need to Know about Plug-in Solar” from the **Clean Energy States Alliance**: <https://tinyurl.com/states-solar>



A Solar Challenge!

*By George Kriebel and
Myra Gordon, Lathrop North*

On March 6th, 2026, Lathrop North kicked off its “Solar Challenge” with a discussion of **balcony or plug-in solar**, an easily installed solar panel that can sit on a balcony, for example, and plug into an outlet. We also discussed **aggregated power**, in which a group purchases electricity from a competitor to the electric supplier. And we looked at **community solar**, whereby customers subscribe to a portion of the energy generated by an off-site solar array. (Community Solar is available in every state except Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wyoming.)

Following the discussion, residents were given the opportunity to sign up for several options available locally to obtain a 100% renewable electricity supply. Occupants of the 77 townhomes at Lathrop North are responsible for their own electricity. The newly installed solar panels on Lathrop North’s Meeting House produce 100% of its electricity year-round. So far 42 townhomes have signed up for 100% renewables. The thermometer pictured sits in the mail room of the Meeting House, to keep us all informed of the status of the challenge.



SSAFE member Daphne Stevens checks progress.

THE VALUE OF A RESILIENCY PLAN

By Ed Gellenbeck, RoseVilla

Located in Portland, OR, where earthquakes and forest fires are more than just remote threats, RoseVilla saw the need for a resiliency plan early and seized the opportunity. Now part of a larger sustainability effort, the resiliency plan has paid off in spades.

In 2020 and 2021, RoseVilla went through a series of extreme weather events that changed how we think about risk. We experienced a record-breaking heat dome, wildfire smoke that made the air some of the worst in the world, and an ice storm that left us without power for a week, all during the COVID pandemic. It became clear this was not just a one-time situation, but something we needed to be ready for.

In response, RoseVilla partnered with Green Hammer, a Portland firm that designs and builds sustainable buildings, to map a practical path forward. Working with several outside consultants, Green Hammer led a year-long process to develop a long-term vision, goals, and strategies for campus resiliency. This work resulted in the Resiliency Action Plan, or RAP, a comprehensive 94-page plan that lays out a 25-year path toward greater resiliency.

The RAP is organized into five stages to make RoseVilla safer and better prepared. It focuses on the risks we are most likely to face, like power outages, wildfire smoke, and a major earthquake, and lays out a step-by-step path to address them. The plan brings together building upgrades, campus improvements, and emergency preparedness into a single, coordinated approach.

After completing the first version of the RAP, a group of residents began meeting monthly with RoseVilla management and Green Hammer to talk through the plan, ask questions, and improve it. Resident input keeps the work grounded in real-life needs, from evacuation plans to staying comfortable during outages, and helps build understanding and support across the community.

In 2025, the RAP project moved from planning to action with its first construction project: a solar-powered, earthquake-resistant resiliency hub designed to provide backup power and clean water during outages, extreme weather, and other emergencies.



*The solar-powered ROSE Port resiliency hub.
Photo by Bill Purcell.*

Residents can claim much credit for this. They have played, and continue to play, an active role in advancing climate resilience at RoseVilla. The Green Team leads sustainability efforts in areas such as native landscaping and resident education. Ready Force—resident volunteers trained in disaster preparedness and response skills using a system modeled after FEMA's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)—is equipped to support neighbors during disasters and

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Resiliency Plan (cont'd)



RoseVilla residents Louise Williams, Jo Berry, Kate Birdsall, Jean Lofy, Ed Gellenbeck, and Steve Morris with emergency supplies. Photo by Bill Purcell.

emergencies. And residents on the Resiliency and Sustainability Committee partner with the administration and consultants on long-term planning.

It's important not to forget that there's monetary value to having a RAP as well. It has allowed RoseVilla to negotiate steady rates with their insurance company because the chapter has acted to limit risk and is poised for emergency response. That adds to the return-on-investment calculations and provides immeasurable practical benefits in an increasingly warming climate.

Want to learn more? Read how the RAP came together and how the resiliency hub helps support the community:

Resiliency Action Planning at RoseVilla
<https://tinyurl.com/RoseVillaResiliency>

ROSE Port: RoseVilla's New Solar-Powered Resiliency Hub
<https://rosevilla.org/roseport-blog/>

Download the RoseVilla 2025 Resiliency Action Plan Project infographic: <https://tinyurl.com/RAP-Infographic>

Living With Climate Change

By George Alexander, Kendal at Longwood

Droughts in Africa. Floods in Bangladesh. Melting glaciers in Antarctica. Is this what comes to mind when you think of climate change? Although we tend to project climate change onto faraway places, it's actually happening right here in our own backyards, and that means it could impact our lives, and our chapters.

It's incontrovertible that the planet is warming. Between 1895 and today, the United States has grown hotter. That means that some geographic areas, such as parts of Florida and Arizona, have just become too hot for seniors, who are especially vulnerable to heat stress. It also means that we can expect more stormy weather events that cause power outages, forced evacuations and smoke due to fire, droughts that affect our agricultural supply, and excessive precipitation.

Some retirement communities may have to expand to other areas or abandon their sites entirely as we see gradual mass migration from low-lying coastal areas, fire- and flood-prone areas, and excessively hot areas. The insurance industry has already responded to these threats: they have increased premiums in places at risk and in some cases refused to offer policies at all.

Climate change is here. Does your community have a plan for dealing with it?

ALL-ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT—THE TIME HAS COME

By Ruth Crawford

Based on an interview with Leslie Parker, Director of Environmental Services, Wake Robin

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all were located in a state like Vermont that mandated composting of food scraps? That climate-forward culture pervades Vermont-based Wake Robin as well, which takes its responsibility for environmental stewardship of their 136 acres very seriously.

The idea of transitioning to all-electric lawn equipment at Wake Robin began with numerous complaints from residents about the loud noise made by their landscapers, as well as the pollution the lawn care equipment emitted into the atmosphere. The Grounds team historically employed a landscape contractor, and in September 2019 the team signed a five-year contract with the landscape company to purchase and use electric rather than gas-powered landscaping tools and equipment.

Going into effect in the beginning of 2020, the transition was not without its challenges. There was some frustration that the contractor could not get a full day's work out of the equipment. The leaf blowers especially were less effective at moving wet leaves than they were for grass cuttings. But the contractor persisted, switching from a previous brand of lawn equipment to STIHL®. This helped with extending the battery life of their commercial riding mowers and other tools.

Potential buyers should be aware that it will cost more to switch to all-electric lawn equipment. A STIHL® riding mower



Landscaper Travis Robitaille riding an electric mower at Wake Robin.

can cost up to \$27,000. However, the contractor spread the cost over the five-year contract period, thus reducing the annual expenditure. Wake Robin didn't want cost to be an impediment, though. The Administration and residents were in sync on that. It was more important to do the right thing, as evidenced by reduced noise and air pollution from gas-powered equipment.

As with any emerging technology, electric equipment continues to evolve to be more competitive with gas. With the increasing cost of gas right now and fuel cost volatility, it is more attractive than ever. Electric equipment also reduces the time and expense of routine maintenance, since there are no oil changes, spark plugs to replace, carburetor cleanings, and so forth. Thus the return on investment with this equipment is excellent, and it can pay for itself within a few years despite the higher capital outlay.

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Electric Lawn Equipment (cont'd)

Just as Vermont has always prided itself for being at the forefront of new technologies, Wake Robin has capitalized on the recent technical improvements in electric landscaping equipment. And their electric supplier is 100% carbon-free, drawing on hydro, nuclear, solar, and wind to produce energy. This was a significant environmental advantage for Wake Robin when they moved from reliance on fossil fuels to electricity. Now the residents are happy, the lawns are thriving, and the environment is breathing free.

For more information, including specifics from Wake Robin's landscape contractor, email lparker@wakerobin.com.

Join the ASK SSAFE Listserv

Looking for practical ideas, peer support, and real-world solutions from fellow SSAFE members? The ASK SSAFE Listserv, a benefit available exclusively to SSAFE members, is one of the easiest ways to tap into the collective knowledge of our network.

Recent discussions have included:

- Car-sharing programs
- Sustainability Director positions
- Reusable dining containers
- Plastic Free July™ campaigns
- Waste tracking and reporting
- Rain barrels and water conservation
- Electric landscaping equipment
- Climate resilience planning
- Climate change humor and outreach

Join the conversation at [SSAFE.org/listserv](https://ssafe.org/listserv).

Extreme Heat is on the Rise

By Dr. Alan Lockwood, Kendal at Oberlin

Do you live in Ohio or Pennsylvania? If so, you will see the greatest rise in heat-related deaths in coming years, according to EPA predictions. But you are not alone: all hot, humid states will experience escalations in heat-associated mortality.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are the life-threatening conditions of concern, and they are particularly prevalent in senior populations. People 65 and older do not adapt well to heat and are more likely to succumb to these conditions because of the concomitant diseases they have and the medications they take. Thus for seniors, climate action plans that include cooling shelters and regulations designed to minimize the effects of the climate emergency are critical.

It's clear that what is happening is not normal. Broad-based, bottom-up movements by citizens, such as the non-violent fight for civil rights, are needed if we are to withstand this heat threat.



To read Dr. Lockwood's public health research and commentary on climate change and heat-related mortality, see www.ssafe.org/educating-residents/heat/

SSAFE: LINKING SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

By Ann Taves, Pilgrim Place

Our SSAFE chapter at Pilgrim Place in Claremont California—and the organizational structure that supports it—grew out of a period of transition. In 2024, changes in executive leadership made our existing approach less effective. While this created uncertainty, it also opened the door to rethinking how sustainability could be integrated into Pilgrim Place’s newly released five-year Strategic Plan.

Since 2000, Pilgrim Place has had an active Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC) that initiated major efforts to reduce water use, increase energy efficiency, and replace lawns with drought-tolerant native plants. The ECC was the prime mover in developing Sustainability Plans in 2013 and 2016. These plans encouraged reductions in water and energy but did not emphasize reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

In late 2022, we launched a new resident-led Climate Resilience Initiative (CRI) to take on this challenge. As a freestanding initiative with representation from ECC and the Buildings and Grounds Committee, its initial focus was on gradually electrifying the 185 independent living homes at Pilgrim Place. However, the process developed by residents and the Buildings and Grounds leadership was not built into Pilgrim Place’s long-range planning and did not survive the leadership transition.

Recognizing the need for a more durable and connected approach, we began to reorganize. CRI transitioned into a task force within the ECC, creating a stronger

link to the Residents’ Association and a more stable foundation for its work.

Around this same time, we discovered SSAFE. Joining SSAFE offered a way to connect our local efforts with a broader network of communities working toward climate solutions. With support from the ECC, the Residents’ Association, and our CEO, the CRI Task Force initiated our application.

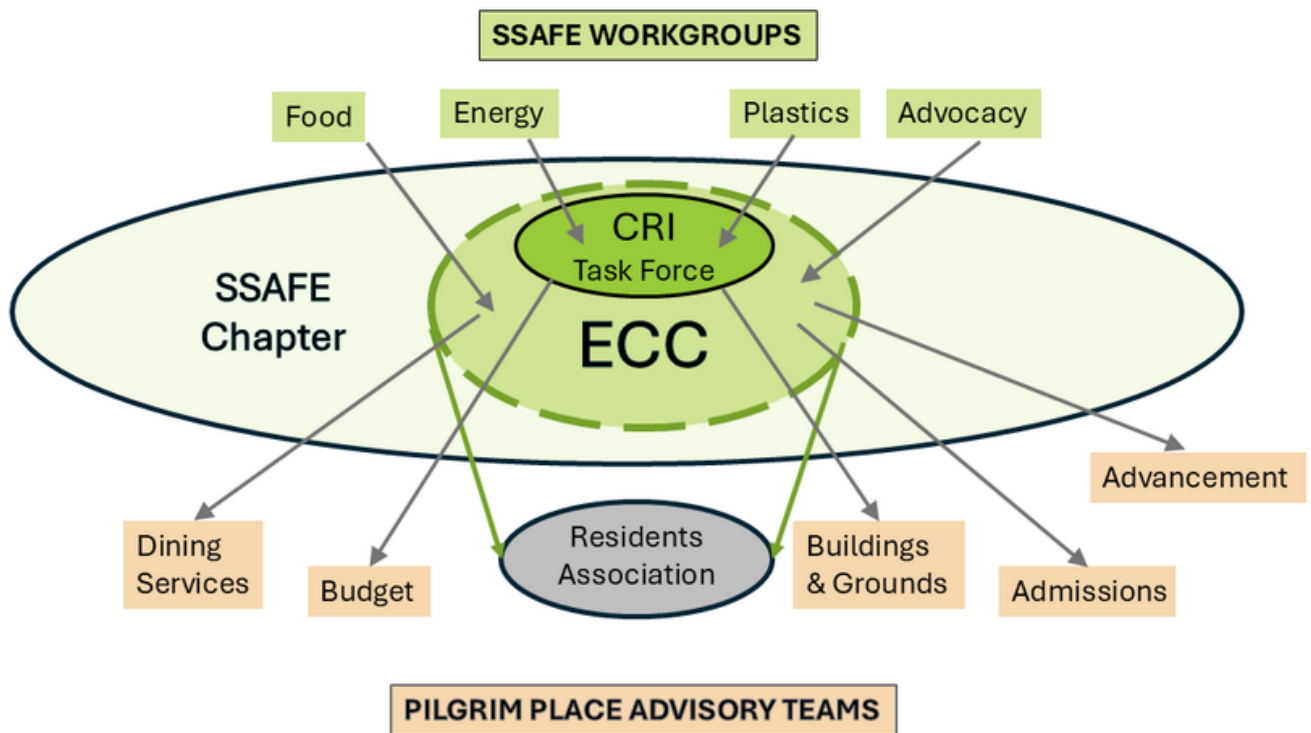
As part of our SSAFE chapter application, we arranged a site visit with Michelle Goodwin, SSAFE Executive Director, and Jenna Woodill, SSAFE Program Manager. To make the most of their September visit, we began by introducing SSAFE to residents and starting the conversation. During the visit, Michelle and Jenna met with both key administrators and residents, and we used the opportunity to ask questions and explore how SSAFE could fit into our emerging organizational structure. Our application was accepted at the October 2025 SSAFE Board meeting, and within weeks we had recruited nearly 70 SSAFE members!

“Our reorganization has positioned us to respond effectively to new opportunities.”

From the outset, we envisioned our three sustainability groups—CRI, ECC, and our SSAFE chapter—as *nested*, interconnected organizations, and we presented them that way to our members. The ECC and CRI, which meet monthly, form the activist heart of our SSAFE chapter. Along with

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Linking Sustainability (cont'd)



fellow residents John Wingler and Mary Johnson, I co-lead CRI, ECC, and SSAFE in various combinations, helping to ensure coordination across all three. Everyone in the smaller CRI committee, which has limited membership, is also a member of ECC and SSAFE. In turn, most residents who attend ECC meetings, which are open to all, are SSAFE members.

In the spirit of broad SSAFE participation, four CRI members and three ECC members have joined SSAFE working groups, and many members attend the regular SSAFE meetings. Input from the Energy Working Group feeds directly into CRI, while reports from SSAFE workgroups are regularly shared as part of the ECC agenda. We also hold quarterly SSAFE chapter meetings to keep members informed and to invite their input.

Our reorganization has positioned us to respond effectively to new opportunities. One is Pilgrim Place's Strategic Plan,

which describes our community as "committed to justice, peace, and care of the Earth," but does not yet define how sustainability will be implemented. Another is the restructuring of resident-administration advisory teams, which now play a key role in shaping future priorities.

Because sustainability touches many areas, ECC and CRI members have joined several of these advisory teams to ensure that environmental considerations are part of the conversation. At the same time, we launched a Sustainability Planning Team to help translate ideas into action. This eight-member group, largely drawn from ECC and CRI, is connected to SSAFE working groups, multiple advisory teams, and the Pilgrim Place Board of Trustees.

We are excited to test our new structure as we work to integrate care for the earth more deeply into our life here at Pilgrim Place.

SSAFE REPRESENTED AT LEADINGAGE CONFERENCES

By the Newsletter Team

At the 2026 annual LeadingAge conferences in Pennsylvania (Hershey, May 12th) and Maryland (Owings Mills, May 19th), George Alexander from Kendal at Longwood represented SSAFE at a session entitled “The Sustainability Edge: A Driver for Distinction.” He was part of a three-person panel that included Wagman Construction and The Stone House Group.

Wagman Construction is currently working with Collington, a SSAFE chapter community, to build their new independent living expansion and assisted living/memory care facility. They focused on how attention to things like energy and maintenance will not only make buildings greener but can also reduce operating costs.

The Stone House Group is a consultancy that ensures sustainable design and operations. They differentiated among the various certifications available for new construction or renovations, including LEEDS, Living Building Challenge, Green Globes, and others. And they emphasized that sustainability can create distinction and promote healthier communities.

SSAFE gained visibility as a network of senior living communities organized around several key sustainability values, all of which are aimed at a net zero outcome for the various chapters. There was particular interest in the Cross-Campus Sustainability Tracker that George presented. This table listed the

SSAFE chapters and identified which sustainability activities and projects were completed or in progress for each. Also popular was the Pathway to Net Zero. But overriding these resources was the message that it's senior living residents who drive the change, who want a better world for the next generation, and who put their expertise and action behind the challenge. They are a powerful resource.



George Alexander from SSAFE presents alongside James Weber from Wagman Construction and Ken Shultes from The Stone House Group.

LeadingAge conferences are attended primarily by administrators of senior living facilities and vendors to the retirement industry. Attendees can earn continuing education credits by participating in the various sessions. In this case, participants gained an understanding of how to leverage sustainability as a marketing edge, attracting environmentally conscious residents and securing a more resilient and profitable future for their organizations.

For more information about LeadingAge, Wagman Construction, and Stone House Group see: www.ssafe.org/announcements/LeadingAge/

WHY ARE WE DOING “THE WORK”?

By Larry Daloz, Kendal at Hanover

For six years now, since 2020, SSAFE members have been doing “the work,” focusing our elder power sharply on the danger of climate change, and deepening our shared commitment to mitigate it. Through the SSAFE newsletter, we have been highlighting the innovations on our campuses and sharing best practices, moving the whole system forward by presenting specific changes that residents, administrators, and staff are making. In our stories, we have tried to balance the planetary, national, and local dimensions of combating climate change. But sometimes we get so grounded in the specifics that we need to take on a little altitude—to step back and remember why we are doing it—why, and for whom.

Recently, at our monthly general meeting, professor and author Kathleen Dean Moore eloquently reminded us that as elders we are singularly privileged with the experience, the time, the expertise, the resources, and the motivation to make a vital difference. Indeed, as elders we have a moral obligation, not simply to detail the urgency of the crisis, but also to take action, to protect what we love. As mature activists committed to caring for the common good, said Moore, “we have no choice.” We cannot *not* care.

So of course “the work” includes reducing our use of plastic, shifting to electric power tools, tightening our building envelopes, eating less beef—but why are we doing all that? Isn’t it also about a call to remember the natural world of our own

childhood, and how we want it to be for the next generation, and the next? Isn’t it about appreciating what is right around us now—marveling at the maple leaf unfurling tender as a baby’s hand, scooping an icy mouthful from a mountain stream, hearing the luminous ee-o-lay of a wood thrush in the silence of a cool summer evening? And holding this love for the “more-than-human world,” isn’t it also about noticing and grieving that we are losing that world?

Our times ask us to do two difficult things at once: to see clearly and grieve what we have already lost, and to work with steadfast strength to protect and preserve what remains. For that, we need a kind of hope at once realistic and tender, that thing with feathers. But those feathers belong to no downy bluebird, said Moore. They are the feathers of an eagle, fierce and determined. We are not powerless. Everything we do disturbs the universe; every choice matters. The children of all species on this wondrous blue-green planet depend on us. We act on behalf of the flourishing of Life itself. That’s “The Work.”



*Thanks to Kathleen Dean Moore,
who sees power in Hope.*

SSAFE Annoucments

SSAFE Welcomes New Chapters

Riderwood Village

With more than 2,000 residents and approximately 1,800 independent living apartment homes, Riderwood Village in Silver Spring, MD, is a large continuing care retirement community where residents are increasingly integrating sustainability into campus life. Founded in 2000, Riderwood has supported resident-led efforts including recycling and composting initiatives, educational programming, pollinator gardens, energy conservation discussions, and collaboration with campus leadership on environmental priorities. Riderwood residents are engaged with management in creating a Sustainability Action Plan to increase the impact of ongoing efforts. Joining SSAFE creates an invaluable opportunity to share and learn from other communities engaged in vital efforts to preserve the earth for present and future generations.

Pennswood Village

Known for its strong culture of resident engagement and environmental stewardship, Pennswood Village in Newtown, PA, is a nonprofit continuing care retirement community founded by Bucks County

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Or, go to www.SSAFE.org/donate

SSAFE supports efforts such as guiding senior living campuses to net zero emissions, climate advocacy, and climate education. Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment (SSAFE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. EIN: 87-1229514.

Quakers in 1980. Residents have supported sustainability efforts through native landscaping, locally sourced dining, recycling, gardening, and conservation-minded planning. Pennswood Village has demonstrated a commitment to sustainability through investments in geothermal heating and cooling, an award-winning stormwater management system, and environmentally responsible development. Their resident-led Environmental Concerns Committee promotes environmental awareness and action throughout the community.

SSAFE Newsletter

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Editor – Ruth Crawford

Contributing Editor – Larry Daloz

Issue Contributors – Larry Daloz, Jean Lofy, George Kriebel, Myra Gordon, Ed Gellenbeck, George Alexander, Alan Lockwood, Ann Taves

Layout/Design – Michelle Goodwin, Jenna Woodill



Submissions & Comments

We want your feedback! We're always looking for good stories to provide inspiration to other senior living community residents. Send us your articles, ideas, questions, or comments!

We'd love to hear from you—drop us an email at info@SSAFE.org