

SOLAR AND BATTERIES FOR ROOMING HOUSES

VPF ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPGRADES: SOUTH PORT COMMUNITY HOUSING GROUP CASE STUDY



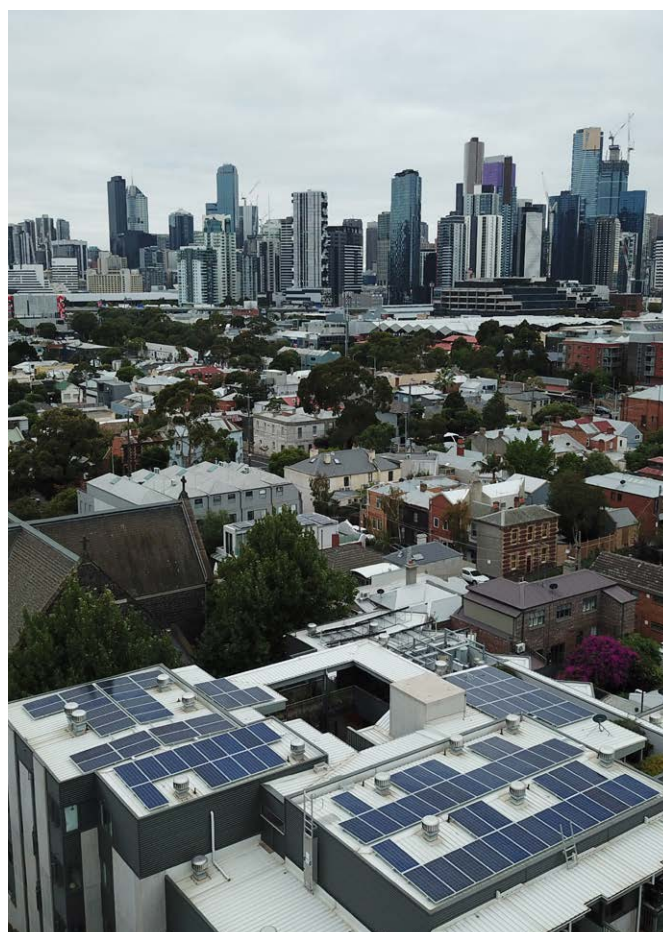
About South Port

Community Housing Group

South Port creates and manages affordable rental housing options in the City of Port Phillip for single adults and young people who have faced homelessness and social exclusion. It manages 15 multi-unit properties with 271 tenancies in total, located in South Melbourne, Albert Park, and Port Melbourne, plus 12 family properties in St Kilda, Elwood, Balaclava, East St Kilda.

Project overview

The VPF grant assisted South Port to install solar on a total of 10 properties: eight multi-unit properties and two standalone homes. The project was expected to deliver annual energy savings of \$30,000 - \$35,000 with 271 tenants to benefit from reduced/maintained utility fees and two households (in standalone properties) to benefit from reduced power bills. It exceeded expectations and delivered 122.39 kW.



Impact



10 TOTAL PROPERTIES
INSTALLED WITH SOLAR



8 MULTI-UNIT



2 STANDALONE



273 TENANCIES



\$30,000 – \$35,000

expected annual savings

106kW

ANTICIPATED
KW PRIOR TO
TENDER

VS



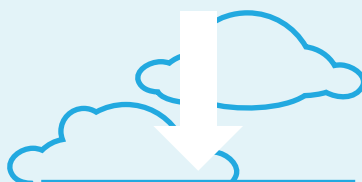
122.39 kW

ACHIEVED



26.2 kWh

of batteries installed



164 tonnes CO2

Reduction in carbon
emissions a year



Equivalent to taking

35.4

passenger vehicles off the
road each year*

*epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator

Rationale

South Port's Finance Coordinator Manuel Andrés Solano Castro had been keen to install energy upgrades on the organisation's properties for some time. In 2015, this desire led him to work with BOOMPower to create desktop business cases of most of its property portfolio, however, the organisation did not have the funds to proceed.

Luckily, this groundwork came into its own when the Victorian Property Fund Environmentally Sustainable Housing Fund grant round was announced; enabling the organisation to quickly identify which of its properties would benefit most from a solar installation.

Importance of the grant

South Port's management was keen to investigate ways to improve the organisation's environmental footprint, however the South Port Board had previously denied a request to invest in solar due to the cost. The Victorian Property Fund grants made financing the solar project possible. Whilst South Port went on to secure an additional \$17,000 from Solar Homes, the VPF grant had already prompted them to begin the project and to upgrade properties that it managed, rather than owned, and would not have been funded by Solar Homes.

The installation of solar panels on the organisation's multi-dwelling properties has ensured those low-income tenants who currently pay for energy costs as part of their rent, will be insured against rising energy prices.

The households in the two standalone properties have benefitting directly via reduced energy bills.



Challenges

Whilst South Port found the installation itself relatively straightforward, the application and planning process was time consuming. The main issues faced were dealing with heritage overlay restrictions on two of the buildings that it wanted to target, and access issues with another building, which required a partial street closure and the use of a crane.

South Port's initial plan to install solar on 12 properties needed to be revised down to 10 following Heritage Victoria's (HV's) concerns about two of those properties; complying with the specifications required to meet HV's regulations made the install too expensive for one of the properties and work on the roof of the second property was totally banned.

Heritage issues

'One of the things that we actually were not expecting was some of the properties being denied solar because of heritage issues. We did a risk diagram before the project and that was actually not even there because we always anticipated that you'd be able to get them on the part of the roof that is not visible,' Manuel says.

'Heritage Victoria they told me that they have specific roof tiles that need to be maintained because of how they look or because of the material so we didn't push it.'



However, South Port was still able to install more total kW overall than initially thought, despite fewer properties being involved when an on-site assessment of one of their properties, in Dorcas Street South Melbourne, discovered it

was able to fit a much bigger solar system than the desktop review had indicated.

The most difficult installation was for a property with a high roof, which required the closure of part of a street whilst a crane was used to install the panels.

Staff considerations



'We were new to these projects so we didn't expect that they would have to use a crane, but it was easy. We needed permission; we talked to the people that we needed to talk to and we knew that we needed to finish the project in mid-March so we offered a five per cent bonus to the installer for completing it on time – and they did it a week before the deadline, no issues.'

Learnings

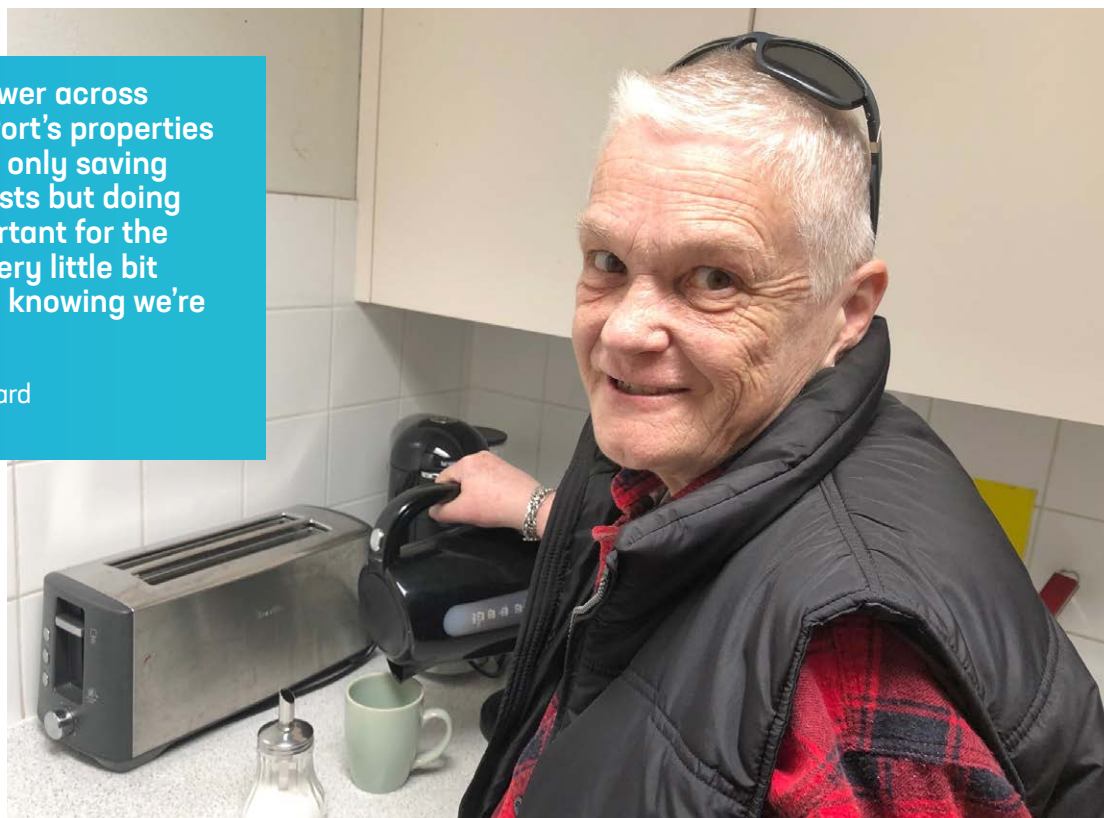
The impact on tenants in the multi-unit dwellings during the solar works was minimal as the install was on the roof and no access to individual units was required. South Port advised tenants that the install was going to happen but the whole process took place quite quickly.

With the standalone properties, the organisation had to liaise with tenants to gain access to their property for the installation but, with the carrot of reduced energy bills, it was a smooth process, Manuel says.

'My advice to others would be not to try and do this on your own. It's a big project; do your research of course, but go to the experts like BOOMPower,' Manuel says.

'Having solar power across some of South Port's properties means we're not only saving on electricity costs but doing something important for the environment. Every little bit counts. It's good knowing we're doing our bit.'

– Sheryl, SPCHG board member and tenant



Next steps

With the experience of the VPF grants behind it, South Port has been successful in applying for a \$17,000 Solar Homes grant to install solar on one of its owned properties. (Solar Homes currently only provides funding for properties that a community housing organisation owns, rather than manages on behalf of the State Government).

South Port is also currently undertaking a redevelopment of its other owned property. The \$10 million redevelopment will deliver a well-designed, highly efficient apartment block with more and bigger apartments and energy saving appliances.

The organisation also plans to use the BOOM! platform to run business cases on its managed properties that did not benefit from the VPF grant, to ensure they are well placed to apply for any future funding opportunities to install solar.

South Port has begun gathering more information about the appliances being used in its properties so it can be proactive in replacing them with more energy efficient models and begin educating tenants about the impact of appliances on their energy usage, and bills.

Input from CHIA Vic and

BOOM! Power

CHIA Vic connected South Port with BOOMPower, who assisted the organisation to undertake the business case assessments and go through the tender process.

'They had the knowledge about the process and had also audited all the devices and panels and providers, so we knew we were going to get a good result,' Manuel says.

'Everyone wanted to help with the environment, but they didn't know how or if it was going to be possible or viable financially, so having the BOOM! platform was essential.'

About CHIA Vic

The Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic) is the peak body that represents the not-for-profit community housing sector in Victoria.

CHIA Vic works to support the growth of community housing as the most effective and efficient means of ensuring more disadvantaged Victorians can enjoy the dignity of safe, secure and appropriate housing.