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Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council selected for Solar Energy Innovation Network project

The Clear Sky Tampa Bay project will create new resources for municipalities, nonprofits and businesses to identify potential for solar and battery installations to support disaster resiliency

PINELLAS PARK, Fla. (Aug. 20, 2020) – Long-lasting power outages caused by hurricanes and other disasters have major impacts on communities and local economies. Leading organizations and energy agencies across the country are working to evaluate the role of solar energy and battery storage on specific buildings to improve local community resilience goals.

An innovative project, led by the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC), has been selected by the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) to participate in a collaborative research effort to develop novel applications of solar energy. NREL is leading the Solar Energy Innovation Network (SEIN) with funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar Energy Technologies Office. NREL pursues fundamental research and development of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies to transform the way we use energy.

The Clear Sky Tampa Bay project is creating a regional technical and economic framework for integrating disaster risk reduction and other resilience factors into solar-plus-storage siting and cost-benefit analyses. The Clear Sky project is one of eight around the country selected to participate in the Solar Energy Innovation Network. The project award includes financial, analytical, and facilitation support. Recent technical reports produced by NREL, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and other institutions have identified the need to create a consistent framework for assessing and defining the value of disaster resilience benefits.

"We selected teams that are experimenting with promising ideas to assess the use of solar power, such as for resilience in commercial-scale applications," said Eric Lockhart, who leads the Innovation Network at NREL. "The work of these teams will provide a blueprint and useful resources for other communities."

The Clear Sky project team includes the TBRPC, the City of Largo and Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas Counties. The project will develop resources which are based on Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Community Lifelines methodology. The new framework and technical and economic decision-support resources will enable municipalities, nonprofit organizations and businesses to identify potential high-value sites for installing solar energy and battery storage systems to improve public safety and disaster preparedness. For example, assessments could look at shelters, refrigerated warehouses which store medicine or food, and municipal buildings and critical infrastructure.

"New information is showing that solar energy combined with battery storage and microgrids can provide targeted community resilience benefits," said Sean Sullivan, Executive Director of the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. "The Clear Sky resources will be provided to all local governments and stakeholder organizations involved in the Resilience Coalition, and will be shared throughout Florida, and nationally."

"The Clear Sky project will provide information to support the integrated sustainability and resilience plans being developed by the counties and cities around the region, and will also engage local utilities," said

Patrick Roff, Council member for the City Bradenton and current chair of the TBRPC. “We expect this project to play a significant role in defining a new framework based on FEMA and disaster criteria.”

Manatee County staff participated in a meeting associated with the first round of the NREL SEIN program, and worked closely with TBRPC to develop the project proposal.

“We consider the nexus of energy, resilience and public safety as mission critical,” said Manatee County Administrator Cheri Coryea. “We have key staff members in place who allow Manatee County to expand both its involvement and coordination with the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, and other area municipalities, to meet the needs of our organization and community.”

“Manatee County, with support from the USF Patel College of Global Sustainability just completed a solar feasibility assessment of all county buildings and facilities,” said Manatee County Commissioner Vanessa Baugh. “This Clear Sky project will give local governments, businesses and organizations new tools to conduct a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis which goes beyond energy savings to understand how it will reduce community risks.”

The City of Largo has also made major commitments to increasing the use of clean energy. “Evaluating the use of solar energy for critical facilities and community buildings requires a comprehensive analysis,” said Largo Mayor Woody Brown. “And this project will help support our goals.”

“For more than a decade, Hillsborough County has been leading an aggressive effort to implement solar energy technologies. Currently, there are 1,449 kilowatts or 1.4 megawatts on county buildings, such as libraries, throughout the community,” said Hillsborough County Commissioner Mariella Smith. “These improvements are cutting energy costs, reducing emissions, and creating more resilient energy sources that can keep critical infrastructure and services running through hurricanes and other crises.”

Pinellas County is developing a countywide sustainability and resilience plan and increasing solar power generation capabilities at schools that are designated as emergency shelters.

“Solar energy and storage can play a greater role in making our county operations and community more resilient to disasters,” said Pinellas County Commissioner Janet C. Long, who is also the Chair of Resilience Coalition.

The Clear Sky project team also includes a private sector partner, Solar Energy Management LLC, and the University of South Florida Patel College of Global Sustainability (PCGS). PCGS Professor Pradeep Haldar has extensive solar finance expertise and integrated the Clear Sky project into his energy finance course.

“Through this collaboration, more than 20 students will learn to use the new tools and develop case studies for the local government partners. By conducting resilience technical-economic assessments for solar plus storage, the students will develop cutting-edge job skills, which are high value,” said Dean Govindan Parayil. “Patel College is delighted to be a partner in the Clear Sky project.”

About the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council

Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council brings together governments to coordinate planning for the community’s future and provide an opportunity for sharing solutions among the local government jurisdictions in the Tampa Bay region. TBRPC works with six counties and 21 municipalities as they make long-range plans related to the future of the Tampa Bay region. The Council’s work focuses on resiliency, planning for climate change and sea level rise, environmental management, water quality, emergency preparedness planning, protection and restoration of the Tampa Bay estuary, economic analysis, coastal zone management, housing and infrastructure analysis, development of regional impact review, local

government comprehensive plan reviews, cross acceptance, dispute resolution and reviews of transportation plans.

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