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Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council launches resilience-based siting resources for solar and storage assessments

PINELLAS PARK, Fla. (12/3/2021) - The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council has developed free, online resources for local governments and community partners to prioritize sites for commercial-scale solar photovoltaic systems combined with battery storage to support community resilience. Integrating solar and storage at these sites has the potential to improve public safety, disaster preparedness and post-disaster recovery in the event of utility grid outages resulting from hurricanes, severe tropical storms, and other natural disasters.

Solar-plus-storage systems can generate electricity to sustain critical facilities and essential community services until utility grid power is restored. However, it can be challenging for local governments, facility owners, operators, and investors to assess the role and suitability of solar-plus-storage as a disaster risk reduction strategy absent standardized processes for evaluating and prioritizing resilience investments and without the technical expertise needed to conduct solar and storage resilience assessments.

Over the past 15 months, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council led a stakeholder team that was 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 in unique locations and contexts. The "Clear Sky Tampa Bay" team was one of eight teams nationally selected to join this round of the program, which is known as the [Solar Energy Innovation Network](#). As part of this initiative, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council created a robust toolkit outlining a streamlined assessment process for siting and prioritizing solar-plus-storage at critical facilities based on community resilience considerations, site feasibility, power requirements, and local utility collaboration. The Clear Sky Decision Support Toolkit can be used to enhance community resilience and inform solar-plus-storage siting and investment decision making.

"During an event where power is out and utility resources are spread thin, making sure our important infrastructure can withstand these hurdles is imperative for our citizens," said Manatee County Commissioner Vanessa Baugh. "This toolkit will help us determine our energy infrastructure needs and evaluate both the tangible and intangible benefits that a solar-plus-storage system can provide."

The Clear Sky Decision Support Toolkit is free for anyone to access at <http://www.tbrpc.org/clearsky/>. Critical facility managers, energy and sustainability coordinators, and emergency management personnel for local municipalities, county, regional, and state governments can use the toolkit to improve the resilience of communities through targeted assessments of solar-plus-storage applications. In addition, private sector entities, local utilities, and infrastructure owners and operators interested in investing in energy solutions for resilience are encouraged to use the toolkit.

Project partners included Hillsborough County, Pinellas County, Manatee County, and the City of Largo, the University of South Florida's Patel College of Global Sustainability, and Converge Strategies, LLC. Various departments within the local government partner communities, including emergency management, resilience, energy, and sustainability, helped identify needs and barriers associated with solar and storage for resilience and informed the toolkit development.

The Clear Sky Tampa Bay project is a great example of pairing innovative technologies, such as solar and battery storage, with resilience efforts to mitigate the harmful impacts of power outages on local communities," said Pasco County Commissioner Jack Mariano. "The project's toolkit is an actionable resource that will strengthen the Tampa Bay Region's emergency preparedness and post-disaster response."

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.