



Legislation Text

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US Department of Energy Rooftop Solar Challenge II Grant (B)

This item involves a request to the City Commission to hear a presentation on the US Department of Energy (DOE) Rooftop Solar Challenge II Grant, the second phase of Broward County's Rooftop Solar Challenge I, which expands the grant initiative to additional entities.

The City of Gainesville has the opportunity to participate with Alachua County as part of Broward County's Rooftop Solar Challenge II grant application. Broward County's Rooftop Solar Challenge II "Go SOLAR Florida" is an approximately \$2 million grant application, requiring a 20% in-kind match. Alachua County has expressed interest in participating with Broward County in the Rooftop Solar Challenge II grant. Broward County's successful completion of Phase I has set the groundwork to expand application, permitting, interconnection, and fee processes for residential and commercial installations to additional regions throughout the state. If awarded, Broward County will serve as the lead and mentor of Phase II and will provide leadership, guidance, and training to participating counties in order to develop a standardized online permitting application specific to each County and their municipalities.

Miami-Dade, Monroe, Orange, and Sarasota Counties have also indicated their interest in participating. This grant will encourage jurisdictions to remove unnecessary solar regulatory barriers through a streamlined process, creating innovative financing options for consumers, and expanding uniform net metering and interconnection standards where possible. The grant will be for 2.5 years, and the in-kind match will be met through staff time. Alachua County would serve as the lead agency for Alachua County and coordinate all grant related issues with Broward County and the municipalities in Alachua County as necessary. Preliminary budget estimates for Alachua County are \$310,000. The County Commission approved a Letter of Commitment at their February 19, 2013 Special Meeting and authorized County staff to seek partnerships with other Alachua County municipalities. The grant application is due by March 8th.

Broward County Grant Abstract

Broward County's Rooftop Solar Challenge II - Go SOLAR Florida Topic Area: Regional standardization (Topic Area B) Prior successes and innovations: As one of 22 regional teams that received funding from the Department of Energy (DOE) under Phase I of the Rooftop Solar Challenge, Broward County has implemented significant improvements that make it easier for residents and businesses of fourteen participating municipalities to use solar energy. Over the past year, the Go SOLAR-Broward project team has: (1) developed and implemented a streamlined, online permitting system for home and business owners and/or their contractors; (2) eliminated all plan review by implementing preapproved design plans within the online system; (3) adopted one, low permit fee, regardless of the size of the system; (4) trained building officials, inspectors and solar and electrical contractors on the use of the online permitting system; (5) developed and adopted a single model zoning ordinance to eliminate unnecessary reviews of solar installations; (6) compiled best practices for financing options and interconnection/net metering standards; and (7) implemented a community-wide education and outreach campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of renewable energy, educate residents about their solar rights under Florida law, and promote the installation of rooftop photovoltaic (PV) systems.

Proposed project: During Phase II, Broward County will build upon the lessons, tools, and experience developed in its inaugural effort to expand the developed approach on a regional basis, beginning with nine (9) additional municipalities within our jurisdiction, and expanding to five (5) large and medium-sized counties from across the State. The combined population impacted by this collaborative well exceeds the 1,000,000 required by DOE. The Go SOLAR-Florida project will seek to reduce fragmentation in the solar market by transferring proven soft cost reduction strategies across participating jurisdictions, working to ensure consistent implementation of those processes, and dramatically increasing the educational outreach to promote rooftop solar installations using the improved processes. Program components include, but are not limited to: (1) Standardize online permitting within each participating jurisdiction, with modifications as appropriate; (2) Encourage participating jurisdictions to remove unnecessary PV regulatory barriers; (3) Work collaboratively to review and implement innovative and effective financing options throughout the state; and (4) Expand uniform net metering and interconnection standards to municipal utilities and cooperatives, wherever feasible.

Gainesville is already a leader in solar energy through GRU's solar feed-in tariff and both the City and County have taken steps to address land use, zoning and permitting issues affecting new solar installations. The City of Gainesville currently allows solar rooftop installation to bypass the development review process and proceed directly through the Building Division to obtain necessary permits. There is more that could be accomplished through a coordinated effort such as is proposed through the Rooftop Solar Challenge II Grant to standardize, align and streamline solar permitting by Gainesville, Alachua County and the other municipalities in the County. It is staff's expectation that the Rooftop Solar Challenge II process would also allow for the development of sound policies addressing the balance between tree preservation and the implementation of renewable energy projects through solar power generation.

Relevant County Issues

County staff has identified some relevant issues. This grant is for rooftop mounted solar power systems, not greenfield. Alachua County is developing an online permitting system that could accommodate a solar module. Alachua County currently handles the permitting for Archer, Hawthorne, Micanopy and LaCrosse. Permitting for solar varies between cities and the unincorporated Alachua County due to the seven other utility providers that serve the County. Soft costs of solar installation, including permitting, interconnection fees, and miscellaneous fees, can total to \$2,500 per installation. Streamlined and standardized permitting processes can help reduce design cost and sign-off time for solar projects.

The costs to the City for participation in the Broward County Rooftop Solar Challenge II grant are expected to be primarily the costs of staff time to work on the project although there could be other costs as well. If the grant is awarded, the City would need to negotiate with Alachua County for a fair sharing of grant funding to cover the City's costs.

Authorize the Mayor to sign a Letter of Commitment for the City of Gainesville's participation with Alachua County as a sub-recipient through Broward County's Rooftop Solar Challenge II Grant application.