



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-00100

Agenda Date: 1/22/2024

Agenda Item Name:

Empower Solar for All

Presenter:

Nkwanda Jah, NAACP Environmental & Climate Justice Committee

Marianne Schmink, Community Weatherization Coalition

Sean McLendon, Economic Development & Food System Manager 352 548 3675

Description:

Hear update on EMPOWER project and a request to join a green job partnership.

Recommended Action:

Hear presentation and authorize the County Chair and City Mayor to sign the green jobs partnership letter of collaboration.

Prior Board Motions:

At the December 12, 2023 County Commission Meeting, the Board authorized staff to continue to work with the EMPOWER team.

Fiscal Note:

There is no fiscal impact to the BOCC currently.

Strategic Guide:

Social and Economic Opportunity

Background:

Project Energy Modernization for People, Opportunity, Work, Equity, and Renewables (EMPOWER) is a community-driven initiative to transition Alachua County, Florida, to 100% clean energy in a way that is equitable and benefits all residents. The US Department of Energy selected the project for a technical assistance grant to support the development of a roadmap for this transition.

Project EMPOWER is exploring the potential to develop programs to:

- Reduce energy bills for residents through expanded energy efficiency and weatherization services.
- Develop a pathway to electrification of space and water heating systems.
- Develop solar projects in eligible low-income neighborhoods, potentially linked in a microgrid for climate resilience.
- Incorporate youth internships in the energy efficiency and construction process.

Project EMPOWER engages with neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and local government to build relationships and learn together. Through an exchange of information with residents, the project will educate itself about energy issues and hear from residents about which questions they want to be addressed and the solutions they want to help income-challenged families and develop an equitable transition to renewable energy and climate resilience.

Benefits of Project EMPOWER

Project EMPOWER has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of Alachua County residents by:

- Reducing energy bills for low-income families
- Creating jobs and economic opportunities in the energy efficiency and construction industries
- Making the community more resilient to power outages
- Promoting environmental justice by ensuring all residents benefit from the transition to clean energy.

The EMPOWER program came from a 2021 County-Wide Forum on Transitioning Towards 100% Clean Energy, sponsored by the Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC). After the Forum, a team that included representatives from the NAACP ECJC and the Community Weatherization Coalition (CWC), Alachua County, Gainesville Regional Utilities, and Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area worked together.

Green Jobs

On October 31, 2022, Project EMPOWER and Santa Fe College hosted a roundtable to discuss creating a green jobs pipeline that would include training, internship, and employment opportunities in Alachua County. Following the roundtable, Project EMPOWER helped create a Green Jobs Advisory Council to continue working towards this goal. NREL has worked with the Green Jobs Advisory Council since spring 2023.

Technical assistance provided to the Green Jobs Advisory Council has included a community workforce baseline analysis, training on using Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and more general resource-sharing on clean energy employment opportunities and impacts.

Green Job Partnership Letter of Collaboration

The EMPOWER team is requesting all team members to sign on to the Letter of Collaboration. This document will assist the team in going after grant requests and shows the institutional, governmental, and community commitment to creating high quality green jobs. Santa Fe College and the Alachua County School Board have signed and the University of Florida will soon sign as well