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January 29, 2015

Andrew Gillum, Mayor and
Commissioners Nancy Miller, Gil Ziffer, Scott Maddox & Curtis Richardson
City Hall
300 South Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dear Mayor Gillum and Commissioners Miller, Ziffer, Maddox & Richardson:

Two years ago Sustainable Tallahassee organized a Renewable Energy Advocacy Committee to promote the expansion of renewable energy in our community. In Tallahassee, that is primarily solar. The League of Women Voters of Tallahassee has also been exploring climate action and renewable energy expansion.

Sustainable Tallahassee now recommends that in addition to the existing Citizens Utility Advisory Committee, a special citizens committee be established that would work with electric utility staff to explore expansion of renewable energy (solar), to set specific goals, and to develop an action plan with target dates to reach these goals.

Three ways to expand solar in the community include 1) utility (owned or purchased power) large scale solar, 2) community solar and 3) increasing incentives for distributed solar on residential roofs and businesses. Two municipal utilities --Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA) and Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) have utility large scale solar arrays 15 MW and 5.9 MW respectively. In addition OUC has a 1 MW solar array on the county civic center and more recently added 400 kW of community solar. Another municipal utility, Gainesville Regional Utilities, contracted to pay customers a premium rate over standard electricity rates which resulted in over 20 MW of solar power.

Community solar has been embraced by a number of communities around the nation and offers a promising opportunity for a smaller and quicker entry point for expanded solar. The concept of community solar (gardens or collectives) allows citizens to purchase solar panels or blocks of production from a central solar array, which delivers power to the utility grid. The value of the power is then credited to an individual's utility bill. As noted above OUC successfully started with a subscribed 400 kW system and now has a waiting list for the planned second system. Currently Tallahassee renters, condo owners, and homeowners with large trees shading roofs do not have an opportunity to buy in to the production of solar energy. With community solar they would.

Tallahassee is an enlightened community blessed with a progressive city government, which has demonstrated a concern for the quality of the environment and the growing threat of climate change. Increasing the amount of power produced by clean non-fossil fuel sources will help avoid the negative effects of carbon accumulation in the atmosphere. More solar power would also address fuel diversification needs. Local renewable energy is the heart of a new energy economy because it is the starting point for creating green jobs and generating local wealth.

During the recent city elections a number of candidates expressed support for the expansion of solar energy. The City of Tallahassee, once a solar municipal leader in Florida, currently only has 1.7 MW of solar, which includes both city and customer owned. This represents less than ¼ of 1% of the systems total capacity of 746 MW.

We recognize that the City of Tallahassee has sufficient electric capacity now and that the need for added capacity has been deferred thanks in part to an aggressive energy efficiency demand-side management program. However at some point there will be a need to replace aging natural gas power generators. In addition, expected new EPA requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will require a cut back in generation of electricity from fossil fuels. As proposed, the EPA regulations will mandate a statewide 38% reduction of CO₂ emissions by 2030. The need to diversify fuel resources coupled with the continuing decrease in the cost of solar panels, means integration of more solar capacity to the system will help COT meet future needs and achieve EPA's goals.

Expansion of solar advances the stated goal in GreenPrint, Tallahassee's strategic sustainability plan that there be increased "... reliance on energy generated from renewable energy."

Sustainable Tallahassee is seeking an opportunity to engage the City Commission and staff in an exploration of feasible options for increasing solar energy production. **Again, we recommend establishing a citizens committee that works with electric utility staff to explore expansion of renewable energy (solar), to set specific goals, and develop an action plan with target dates to reach these goals.**

During 2005-2007 the City of Tallahassee, working with members of the Big Bend Climate Action Team, developed an Integrated Resource Plan, which incorporated methods for achieving robust clean energy. That implemented plan led to the City becoming the #1 Utility in the United States. It is time to revisit and reinvigorate this effort so as to make Tallahassee the Capital of Innovation.

Sincerely,

/s/

Anthony Gaudio,
President

/s/

Stew Parsons
Chair, Renewable Energy Advocacy Committee

cc: Anita Favors-Thompson, City Manager