

August 20, 2010

Florida Funds Residential HVAC Rebate Program

Beginning Monday, August 30, 2010, Florida homeowners who upgrade their air conditioning systems can qualify to receive a \$1,500 rebate. The program will end on Friday, December 31, 2010, or when the \$15 million in rebate funds are depleted. Due to the limited amount of rebate funds, rebates will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Consumers who purchase and install a new central air conditioner, air source heat pump or geothermal heat pump that meets Federal Energy Tax Credits standards can receive rebates of up to \$1,500 per household. [\[More\]](#)

Solar Rebate Program Receives Additional Funding

The Florida Solar Energy Incentives Program, which began in 2006, paid up to \$20,000 for solar electric panels on Florida homes. But the program has received no money from the Legislature since 2008 and expired under state law on June 30. The backlog of \$52 million in requested rebates continues to increase as applications for work done before June 30 are received.

On August 13, the Florida Energy and Climate Commission agreed to use \$13.9 million in federal stimulus dollars to pay for some of that backlog. The U.S. Department of Energy approved using the federal stimulus money, said Rob Vickers, director of the Governor's Energy Office. Those applications that will be paid with the new money were received after June 2009. [\[More\]](#)

EPA Releases Green Building Toolkit for Local Governments

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the Sustainable Design and Green Building Toolkit for Local Governments (Toolkit) in order to assist local governments in identifying and removing barriers to sustainable design and green building within their permitting process. This Toolkit addresses the codes/ordinances that would affect the design, construction, renovation, and operation and maintenance of a building and its immediate site. There are two sections to the Toolkit: the first section is an Assessment Tool and Resource Guide. The second section is a guide to developing an Action Plan for implementing changes within a community's permitting process. [\[Download Toolkit\]](#)

Florida Raises Revenue Estimates for 2011

State economists have been the bearers of bad news for the past few years, but this week, they raised revenue estimates for next year by 1.4 percent from calculations made five months ago. Meeting to tweak revenue estimates for the coming three years, a panel of analysts from the Legislature, the governor's office and the Department of Revenue said collections into state coffers would increase \$260 million for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011. The forecast for general revenue collection for the remainder of the current fiscal year also went up, increasing 1.1 percent, or \$229 million, to \$23.0 billion. The 2010 figure is 2.4 percent above 2009-2010 collections, a year-to-year increase that is expected to continue through 2014. That's good news of course, but Amy Baker, coordinator for the legislative Office of Economic and Demographic Research said she was only "cautiously optimistic." The sun likely won't come all the way out for Florida's economy until the spring of 2011, she said.

Death of the 'McMansion'

In its latest report on home-buying trends, real-estate site Trulia declares: "The McMansion Era Is Over." Just 9 percent of the people surveyed by Trulia said their ideal home size was over 3,200 square feet. Meanwhile, more than one-third said their ideal size was under 2,000 feet. The comments echoed those made in June by Kermit Baker, the chief economist at the American Institute of Architects. [\[More\]](#)

Recovery Act Helps Central Florida Businesses Save Energy

Businesses interested in shaving their energy costs are getting a nudge from local government thanks to federal economic-stimulus funds. Kick the Kilowatt is an energy-tracking-and-saving program developed by the Central Florida Energy Efficiency Alliance, created last summer with money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Operated by Orange County's Environmental Protection Division, the program is open to any business in Central Florida.

The program's goal is to reduce businesses' energy use 10 percent a year for three years, or roughly 30 percent by 2012. An energy specialist gathers data on a company's energy use for comparison with other businesses in an Energy Star "portfolio manager." Once a year's worth of information is collected, a business can be compared with others; those scoring in the top 25 percent are issued Energy Star certifications, while those in the lower 75 percent are offered cost-effective ways to reduce their energy costs. Almost 1,400 buildings throughout the region have registered with the Orange County-run Kilowatt Challenge so far. [\[More\]](#)

Solar Facility Planned for Walton County

Energy Farm, Inc. is planning to build a 74 -megawatt solar facility in Walton County. The "energy farm" will break ground later this year and start providing power next year, generating enough electricity from photovoltaic cells to power 12,000 homes. The heart of the plant will be more than 350,000 utility-scale solar panels, employing next generation, highly-efficient, thin film

technology. Energy Farm is completing negotiations on long term contracts to sell the power to utility companies. Other smaller scale projects are planned for the Gulf Coast region. According to Monique Harris, director of communications for the Washington D.C.-based Solar Energy Industries Association, this will be Florida's largest solar power plant and one of the largest such plants in the United States. [\[More\]](#)

St. Lucie County Creates Energy Loan Fund

St. Lucie County will receive \$2.9 million to help finance the County's Solar and Energy Loan Fund. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is awarding 20 communities more than \$60 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to implement local energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. St. Lucie County was the only agency in Florida to receive grant funding through the DOE's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program. Additionally, St. Lucie County is one of five Florida counties that has been invited to partner with the State of Florida in submitting a grant application for \$5 million to DOE. If the grant is awarded, St. Lucie County will receive \$800,000 to help finance its Solar and Energy Loan Fund.

These funds will provide St. Lucie County individuals and businesses with affordable loans to achieve energy efficiency upgrades and install recommended roof-top solar technologies (i.e., solar hot water heaters and photovoltaic systems). The goal of the program is to keep the interest payments equal to or less than what residents and businesses would be saving on their monthly electric bill. The loans would be guaranteed through a voluntary property tax assessment that stays with the property, not the individual borrower.

St. Lucie County will use this \$2.9 million along with the \$20 million in commitments that have already been pledged by four financial institutions (PNC, Sun Trust, Oculina, and IBM PGA banks). The County is working to start the Solar and Energy Loan Fund and transition it to a non-profit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). [\[More\]](#)

FEMA Approves Florida's Updated Mitigation Plan

Governor Charlie Crist today announced that the Florida Division of Emergency Management has received approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Florida's updated 2010 enhanced mitigation plan. The recent approval of the plan by FEMA continues the increased percentage of total federal assistance the state receives for disaster mitigation activities at 20 percent, compared to 15 percent for states without an approved enhanced plan. [\[More\]](#)