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# Commission gives its approval to feed-in tariff for solar power

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Beginning March 1, those in Gainesville with new solar photovoltaic systems will be eligible to receive 32 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity produced by the system over the next 20 years.

After a "historic day" filled with accolades and anticipation, city commissioners on Thursday approved the nation's first solar feed-in tariff ordinance, which will replace Gainesville Regional Utilities' current rebate program.

The many proponents of the renewable energy incentive - from local residents hoping to install systems to international photovoltaic manufacturers - are projecting the policy will stimulate millions of dollars in private investment in solar energy.

What could attract that level of investment, according to Don Davis, Gainesville president of Capital City Bank, is a 5 percent return on investment after taxes in a 20-year fixed contract.

Ed Regan, assistant general manager of strategic planning for GRU, said people are "lining up" to be the first recipients of the 20-year contract.

The ordinance sets a maximum of 4 megawatts of solar panel installation a year that would take part in the feed-in tariff. However, Regan said 4 megawatts would be a huge boon considering the state of Florida only has two megawatts currently installed.

Regan said he would be pleased with one or two megawatts a year installation.

Additionally, the ordinance includes a reduction in the amount paid per kilowatt hour to those who install solar equipment beginning in the third year, which takes into account that by then technology should be less costly.

Murray Cameron, vice president of the European Photovoltaic Industry Association, was one of eight delegates who visited Washington, D.C., Tallahassee and Gainesville this week to learn about the potential for launching North American branches of their corporations.

"This is a little bit of a feeling of déjà vu for us," Cameron said. "Because in Germany it was not the federal level that introduced feed-in tariffs, it was local."

Cameron and the other delegates, who attended a workshop Thursday in GRU's multi-purpose room, outlined the growth of solar installation after Germany introduced a feed-in tariff in 2003.

"There are more jobs in solar electricity today than in coal ... than in nuclear," Cameron said.

The Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce presented the area's strengths to the companies that were looking for investment opportunities.

Cameron said that there would have to be evidence of substantial demand in the state and nation before these companies entered the market locally, somewhere in the order of 40 megawatts of installation a year.

Eric Wachsman from the Florida Institute for Sustainable Energy presented how the University of Florida could be a valuable resource for a budding solar industry in Gainesville.

Aside from a large department of material sciences, which studies photovoltaic technology, Wachsman pointed to a \$40 million grant that created an institute for renewable energy, much of which will go to UF.

"This promotes the type of resources you need that attracts investors with a trained work force," Wachsman said.

Wachsman said he has watched many talented doctorate students leave Gainesville to take jobs with renewable energy companies, but since GRU proposed Gainesville's feed-in tariff policy, at least one has expressed interest in returning.

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