

JEA Needs More Solar Energy Sources

By Carr Smith

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Thanks to the efforts of involved citizens and leaders, JEA remains owned by the city and the citizens of Jacksonville, with a new team of leaders and dedicated JEA employees. There is no better time than now to move forward and join the utilities across the country that are planning and implementing solar electric generation to replace coal and gas, including Florida Power and Light, a part NextEra Energy USA.

Jacksonville has recognized the fact of sea level rise and is planning actions to make the city and neighborhoods resilient to flooding. What Jacksonville has not yet admitted to or addressed are the causes of sea rise- climate change due to greenhouses gases. Solar generation will address the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The assumption that solar generation and battery storage is too costly to implement is no longer true. According to the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology, M.I.T. , over the last 40 years the cost to manufacture a photovoltaic cell has been reduced by 99 %. Solar electric generation with battery storage is now competitive with all other means of electric power generation and, in some situations, economically better than older methods. Driving along I -95 and I-10, we pass many large solar arrays already in use by private and public utilities. Those arrays wouldn't be there if the economics weren't favorable.

The air pollution and greenhouse gas drawbacks of burning coal are well known- CO₂, particulate pollution and other negative effects. "Natural Gas" is a marketing term for what is primarily fracked methane. As a greenhouse gas, methane traps heat at a rate over 100 times that of CO₂. Methane leaks in fracking and transporting are a serious problem. While gas combustion puts less CO₂ than coal into the air, it is not a completely "clean" fuel, and still adds to CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions.

Solar generation is supported by facts and common sense:

Solar power does not require combustion of anything, and as such, requires no cooling system using water- a must in power generation by combustion of coal or gas or by nuclear heat. Sunlight is free. Sunrise has never yet failed. Sunlight doesn't require transportation by train, truck, or pipeline. Coal and uranium miners contract occupational diseases such as black lung, fibrosis, and lung cancer. No one has to mine sunlight. Sunlight does not put greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Sunlight does not leave coal ash or spent nuclear fuel that risk contamination.

Transforming power generation from coal or gas combustion will require new knowledge and training of JEA's most important asset, JEA employees, our neighbors. The new JEA team and the great JEA workforce will meet that challenge, just as they have in prior years.