

FPL plans world's largest solar battery system in Manatee

By Chris Wille Herald Tribune Business Editor Mar 28, 2019

Florida Power & Light Co. unveiled plans Thursday to build another mega-solar project in Manatee County. FPL's drive to hasten the closure of two 1970s-era fossil-fuel generation units and modernize now features the construction of the world's largest solar-powered battery system — four times the capacity of the largest battery system in operation.



The Manatee Solar Energy Center in Parrish on Feb. 9, 2017. Florida Power & Light Co. unveiled plans on Thursday to build the world's largest solar-powered battery system next to the plant in Parrish. The utility will demolish the two aging natural gas units in the background. [PROVIDED BY FPL]

The future FPL Manatee Energy Storage Center will have 409 megawatts of capacity — the equivalent of approximately 100 million iPhone batteries, the company stated in the announcement. The utility plans to begin serving customers in late 2021, and the stored energy will come from an existing and neighboring FPL solar power plant in Manatee County. The utility declined to give estimates of the cost to build the Manatee Energy Storage Center.

By deploying energy from the batteries when there is higher demand for electricity, FPL will offset the need to run other power plants — further reducing emissions and saving customers money through avoided fuel costs, the company said. The plant will be able to distribute 900 MWh (megawatt hours) of electricity.

FPL customers will save more than \$100 million, the company states, and more than 1 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions will be eliminated. “This is a monumental milestone in realizing the full benefits of solar power and yet another example of how FPL is working hard to position Florida as the global gold standard for

clean energy,” said Eric Silagy, president and CEO of FPL. “Even as we aggressively execute on our plan to install 30 million solar panels by 2030, we never lose sight of finding innovative ways to bring our customers the benefits of solar energy, even when the sun’s not shining.”

“Replacing a large, aging fossil fuel plant with a mega battery that’s adjacent to a large solar plant is another world-first accomplishment,” Silagy said. The battery system will be built on 40 acres next to FPL’s solar power plant in Parrish, which opened in 2016. The utility will demolish two aging natural gas units that have dotted the skyline there for nearly 50 years.

“Manatee County is always happy to work with FPL,” said Manatee County Commissioner Priscilla Trace. “As a person who works across the street from the plant, FPL is a good neighbor, and the company’s continued success and plan to modernize the facility is good for the Parrish community.”

With the price of battery and solar technology continuing to decline, FPL said it is taking an innovative approach to modernizing its fleet. In addition to the Manatee project, FPL is planning smaller battery installations across the state, numerous solar power plants and efficiency upgrades to existing combustion turbines at other power plants to replace the 1,638 megawatts of generating capacity.

“The way we generate, store, transport and use electricity is being reinvented,” said Temperince Morgan, executive director of the Florida Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, quoted in the company’s announcement. “New technology, like large-scale battery storage, is a critical step on the path to a cleaner, cheaper and more efficient energy future. Achieving this outcome is critical to the well-being of our economy, our communities and our planet.”