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**City of Duluth Communications Office**

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**SUBJECT: City of Duluth selected for \$1 million resilience planning award from US Department of Energy to evaluate pathways for solar energy production opportunities**

**BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer**

**City of Duluth selected for \$1 million resilience planning award from US Department of Energy to evaluate pathways for solar energy production opportunities**

[Duluth, MN] The City of Duluth has been selected for an award of \$1 Million from the US Department of Energy's Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO) to investigate solar project pathways and develop a replicable community-based energy resilience planning process. The two-year project will study community needs during grid disruptions and evaluate the deployment potential of solar-plus-storage and microgrids by learning from past disasters experienced in northeastern Minnesota. When completed, the framework will guide City solar deployment and help inform resilient energy improvements for other cold climate communities.

Measuring and strengthening the adaptability of Duluth's community infrastructure during grid disruptions, particularly those caused by major weather events (such as the June 2012 flood, 2016 wind storm, and 2017-2018 coastal storms), is a key focus of the project. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Duluth can anticipate an increase in storm frequency and flooding issues as a result of climate change. The SETO project will study innovative ways to increase resilience in the face of grid disruption via solar energy and energy storage, which can provide vital electrical grid backup in the case of power outages. Project partners will evaluate public, institutional, and critical infrastructure sites for viability as community energy resiliency sites.

The project proposal was selected as an awardee through the U.S. Department of Energy Renewables Advancing Community Energy Resilience (RACER) funding program. RACER seeks to increase the resilience of energy systems and strengthen community preparedness to withstand and recover rapidly from disasters.

"The Department of Energy RACER funding will help the City and our community, utility, and non-profit partners explore technical, economic, and legal pathways for adding large-scale solar in the City of Duluth," says Mindy Granley, Sustainability Officer for the City of Duluth. "However, we also have a chance to engage with community members, to explore their values and desires for energy resiliency too."

The project's plan of building resilience and adaptability to grid disruptions, especially in low-income communities and those with limited mobility options, overlaps with the goals of the City of Duluth Climate Action Work Plan (CAWP).

"Duluth has seen a number of natural disasters over the last decade that have had massive impacts to our landscape, our homes, and our mobility, and this award allows the City to really dig in and find economically-beneficial, sustainable solutions to respond to those types of disasters when they happen," says Mayor Emily Larson about the RACER Award. "This allows us to find solutions to shoring up our grid and lower the costs of responding to the impactful storms that might otherwise slow our community down for significant periods of time."

Residents and community organizations alike have recognized the importance of disaster resilience. One such group is Ready North – a network of public and nonprofit agencies and resources helping the community prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. “Reliable, accessible energy sources are a key component of community strength and safety” says Michelle Morris of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, an organization that serves as a member of Ready North. “Investing in preparation and back-up resources, like solar storage, can mean the difference between disaster and adaptability for local residents.”

The project will be completed in collaboration with Ecolibrium3 (Eco3), a Lincoln Park neighborhood non-profit with a mission to lead and inspire change toward an equitable and sustainable future. Eco3 has had a long-term dual focus on the Lincoln Park neighborhood and community-wide energy transition.

“Now is the time to invest in Duluth’s resilience and renewable energy infrastructure, and the first step is determining how to do so in a way that best serves community needs,” says Jodi Slick, CEO of Eco3. “The RACER Award will make these determinations possible by funding studies of resident needs and minimum resilience standards, as well as technical examinations of potential solar sites, to ensure a bright future for Duluth.”

Project partners (including Ecolibrium3, Grid Catalyst, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Minnesota-Duluth) will also develop a replicable methodology for establishing community-informed resilience planning and multi-hazard mitigation. The methodology will cater to cold climate communities with populations under 250,000. As a technical goal, asset mapping and technical, legal, and economic analyses of potential renewable energy sites will be completed in Duluth to identify future energy resilience projects and funding pathways. Overall, award funds will be used to establish a temporary resiliency coordinator position at the City, develop a greater understanding of the functional needs and deployment potential of solar in the Duluth community, and create a toolkit and methodology for use in other Midwest cold climate communities.

### **About the Solar Technologies Office**

The U.S. Department of Energy Solar Technologies Office supports research and development across the solar energy spectrum to drive innovation, lower costs, and support an equitable transition to a decarbonized economy. Learn more at <https://www.energy.gov/solar-office>.

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