

From the Jacksonville Business Journal:
<https://www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville/news/2018/04/02/jea-solar-policy-changes-now-in-effect.html>

JEA solar policy changes now in effect

Apr 2, 2018, 12:03pm EDT

Changes made to JEA's solar policies in October – a 67 percent cut to net-metering payments and a battery rebate up to \$4,000 – are now in effect. Rooftop solar installers pushed back against the changes out of fear that it will deter new installation, but JEA lauded its proposed solar farms (announced in tandem with the policy changes) and has publicly floated the idea of becoming a residential installer down the road.



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The utility's board in October approved a reduction in net-metering payments from 10 cents per kilowatt hour to 3 cents, a significant cut to the money homeowners' would receive when excess power generated by their solar panels flows into the grid. Existing customers keep the 10-cent payment, so the policy change only affects new installers.

In the same meeting, the board voted to create an incentive to add batteries to home solar arrays and to acquire land to build solar farms. The incentive offers a 30 percent rebate, up to \$4,000, to install a battery, which can be coupled with a 30 percent federal tax incentive.

Batteries would store excess power generated by solar panels, meaning JEA wouldn't have to buy back the energy when demand is lowest and would have fewer customers to serve when demand is highest, staffers explained. Board members also contended that a solar subsidy was no longer warranted now that utility-scale solar power has reached price parity with fossil fuels.

The solar farms planned by JEA would quintuple its current solar generation to 250 megawatts and could be operational by the end of 2019. Staffers claimed that the increased solar generation would make Jacksonville the largest solar community in the United States per capita.

Push back from solar installers was immediate. Miami-based Goldin Solar withdrew its operations from Jacksonville, and Solar United Neighbors, a solar power co-op, cancelled plans to start a co-op in Duval County. Others lobbied to postpone the change, impose a less drastic net-metering cut or repeal the change altogether.

In light of complaints, JEA doubled the maximum amount of money it will pay per battery to \$4,000, but the rest of the policy remains unchanged.

During a March press conference, JEA CEO Paul McElroy noted the utility was exploring new sources of revenue, and one such potential source was residential solar installation. The entire power utility industry is facing declining sales due to the proliferation of energy efficient products, and home solar generation further reduces grid demand.

"The classic revenue streams for utilities are being disrupted," said McElroy. "We're looking at opportunities to create new streams and turn those challenges into opportunities."

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