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South Miami makes solar PV panels mandatory for new houses

North America, Carbon Reduction, COP 21, Policy, Smart Cities, Sustainable Energy

A new law requiring all new homes built in the city to have solar panels, making South Miami the first city outside California to support such an initiative.



Under the new law passed on 18 July 2017 from South Miami City Commission, new residential construction would require 175 square feet of solar panels to be installed per 1,000 square feet of sunlit roof area, or 2.75 kW per 1,000 square feet of living space, whichever is less.

Home renovations that replace more than 75 per cent of the premise, or extend the structure by more than 75 per cent will have to comply too.

Exceptions are in place, for example if the house is to be built under existing trees.

South Miami Mayor Philip Stoddard, a biology professor at Florida International University said: "Solar reduces the cost of home ownership, it makes houses sell faster, it returns more to a builder, it makes local jobs, and most importantly, it reduces carbon emissions today to help our children and grandchildren have a better future tomorrow".

He also expressed concerns over climate change consequences and the risks that South Miami has to mitigate, especially as sea levels rise.

"We're down in South Florida where climate change and sea level rise are existential threats, so we're looking for every opportunity to promote renewable energy," Stoddard said. "It's carbon reduction, plain and simple. We have a pledge for carbon neutrality. We support the Paris Climate Agreement."

Commissioner Josh Liebman dissented, saying that he is not against solar, but he supports "the freedom of choice", also expressing concerns over the fact that nearly 7 percent of the city's budget comes from fees the utility pays to South Miami.

"So even if we were going to give up one-sixth of that, it would still be 1 percent of our budget. Where is the substitute?"

Jeremy Forestone, Director of the Center for Carbon-free Power Integration at the University of Delaware expressed its satisfaction with the decision, saying that at a time when the Federal Government has stepped back from advocating for renewable energy, action on the local level is critical.

The largest city in the country to mandate rooftop solar panels so far is San Francisco, which passed the respective law in January 2017.

Other cities in California that have mandated solar panels in new buildings are Culver City, San Mateo, Lancaster, Sebastopol and Santa Monica.

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