

## New city in Florida to run on solar power

**A new city will be powered by solar energy -- and cost the average Florida Power & Light customer about 31 cents a month.**



*A rendering of the Babcock Ranch development in Southwest Florida.*

Florida Power & Light says it will be the first solar-powered city in the nation.  
**BABCOCK RANCH**

**BY JOHN DORSCHNER**  
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A Florida developer announced an ambitious plan Thursday for a 19,500-home city with energy-efficient buildings that will be "the first city on earth powered by zero-emission solar energy."

The new city, Babcock Ranch, will be developed by Kitson & Partners on 17,000 acres northeast of Fort Myers. It will include the world's largest photovoltaic power plant, which will be operated by Florida Power & Light. Buildings will be certified

green and surrounded by thousands of acres of open space.

"We're out to prove that it works economically," developer Syd Kitson told The Miami Herald. "And it's the right thing to do for the long-term solutions in this country."

Though researchers are working to create storage capability for sunlight-generated power, solar electricity at present is available only during daytime hours.

Kitson's concept is that FPL's 75-megawatt solar generator will produce more power for the state's electric grid while the sun shines than the city will use in 24 hours. That means Babcock Ranch will have to rely on conventional power sources for the evening, but its net effect will be a solar-only city.

The solar panels will sit on 350 acres within the development. More than half of the city's 17,000 acres will be permanently protected as greenways and open space, the developer said, and will adjoin the 73,000-acre Babcock Ranch Preserve that has been purchased by the state.

FPL estimates the Babcock solar facility will cost about \$300 million and add about 31 cents to the average customer's monthly bill. Among other projects in the years ahead, the company is also working to add 1,200 megawatts of power fueled by natural gas in Palm Beach County and 2,200 megawatts of new nuclear power at Turkey Point.

### **AMERICA'S FUTURE**

The Babcock project was announced Thursday in a press conference in Washington, attended by FPL executives, politicians and environmentalists. "This is a national story," said Kitson, "and we wanted to get it out to a broader audience. Clean energy and sustainable development are the future of America. This will be a living laboratory for companies, workers and families. And it will create jobs."

The developer commissioned a study by Fishkind & Associates that reported the city of Babcock Ranch will generate 20,000 permanent jobs plus thousands of temporary positions for construction.

Kitson said all of the plans are contingent on the real-estate economy recovering, but he believes the green aspects of the project will entice many who will bypass traditional developments now in foreclosure.

The developer said Babcock Ranch will have an integrated "smart grid" allowing power users to monitor and control their energy consumption. "All commercial buildings and homes in the new city will be certified as energy-efficient and constructed according to Florida Green Building Council standards," the company said.

Kitson, a former offensive guard with the Green Bay Packers and Dallas Cowboys, is head of the developing group based in Palm Beach Gardens. For the past several years, he has been engaged in complex efforts to develop the area after purchasing the 90,000-acre Babcock Ranch in 2006 -- an area five times the size of Manhattan.

After lengthy negotiations, he arranged to sell 73,000 acres to the state for about \$350 million for what has become the Babcock Ranch Preserve, a permanent open space. He then worked with Charlotte County to develop the remaining 17,000 acres -- and ran into trouble with environmentalists.

## **DENSITY RIGHTS**

"We sued to stop the permit," recalled Frank Jackalone, the Sierra Club's Florida staff director. The ranch had been zoned for one house per 10 acres, but the developer transferred all the density rights of the preserve to the acres he was developing -- and then more than doubled density in an agreement with the county.

In settlement negotiations, "we developed very strong rules on how they should operate," said Jackalone, including the use of renewable energy, water restrictions and open space.

But Thursday's announcement went far beyond the agreement worked out with the Sierra Club. "That was a very pleasant surprise," said Jackalone. "We were thrilled. It provides a model for the country -- a high benchmark for others to try to reach."

The solar project will be the fourth planned by FPL. The first three, totaling 110 megawatts, were planned after the Legislature passed a bill allowing a utility to have full-cost recovery of renewable energy projects up to 110 megawatts.

FPL spokeswoman Jackie Anderson said the Babcock solar project is contingent upon approvals from the Public Service Commission and action by the Legislature to approve new arrangements for renewable energy that would make the project economically worthwhile.

Kitson said the new city will include a wide range of housing, from models affordable for blue-collar workers to upscale manses.

Subject to approvals, groundbreaking on the solar plant could start later this year. Construction of the city center could begin next year. Plans include six million square feet of retail, commercial, office, civic and light industrial space.

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