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Gibson Plaza to Get New Roof & Solar Panels

SELF, Miami-Dade County, and the Lowenstein Foundation team up to build climate-resilient, sustainable low-income housing.

Miami, FL – The residents of Gibson Plaza will soon be living in safer, more climate-resilient housing powered by solar energy. The Solar and Energy Loan Fund (SELF) leveraged support from the Leon Lowenstein Foundation and Miami-Dade local government to create a public-private-nonprofit partnership to fund the project.

SELF received a grant for their “Gib-Sun” Plaza Project, a plan to install solar panels on a five-story apartment building for low-income seniors in the heart of Coconut Grove. The Lowenstein Foundation provided a \$200,000 grant via the American Green Bank Consortium to purchase the solar panels and pay for the installation.

“We are proud to work with Miami-Dade County Public Housing and Community Development (PHCD) to build a healthy environment with solar energy and climate resilience for low-income seniors in Florida.” said SELF CFO, Duanne Andrade, who spearheaded the plan. The pilot project is designed as a cost-effective model for solar energy on multi-family housing that reduces pollution, lowers energy costs, and increases resilience.

Miami-Dade County is committing up to \$500,000 to install a new “solar-ready roof” to replace the old roof and provide long-term structural support for the solar PV system.

“The most vulnerable in our community are also those most at risk from climate impacts,” said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. “I am thrilled to support this project that leverages public, private, and nonprofit partnerships to provide families with safer, more resilient housing, while moving our community toward the goal of becoming carbon-neutral.”

The goal of the project is to reduce life-threatening climate impacts on low-income and vulnerable elderly residents, with special consideration for medical needs and emergency preparedness. A portion of the budget will go towards battery storage to provide electricity during emergency situations, for common areas like hallways, the elevator, and the administrative office, where medications must be refrigerated.

Public Housing Community Development Director, Michael Liu, noted that “during a natural disaster, providing power for critical functions such as elevator usage, refrigeration of medicines, and recharging medical equipment such as electric wheelchairs should be a basic essential service provided by the County to its most vulnerable population. The County is looking at affordable housing more comprehensively and considering variable resilience factors and innovative solutions. This Lowenstein grant is yet another way to show that we are committed to continually making building enhancements and improvements that benefit our residents.”

Ken Russell, the City of Miami Commissioner for the district said in a letter of support, “Loss of power... is a top concern for City residents, especially low-income and elderly residents.... Since this project is located in the City of Miami, it will need to go through the City's Building department for permit processing. City of Miami is committed to working with the project team to facilitate this project.” To keep costs down, the permitting fees for solar panel installation will be waived due to an ordinance that was passed at City Commission.

“SELF was founded on the idea that everyone should benefit from clean energy, climate resilience, and sustainability,” said SELF Founder and Executive Director, Doug Coward. He said, “We’re pleased to be working with Miami-Dade County and we are thankful for the support from the American Green Bank Consortium and the Lowenstein Foundation.” He stressed that this project is a prime example of how local governments, foundations, and nonprofits can work together to address a crucial gap: low-income multi-family, sustainable resilient housing.

About the Solar and Energy Loan Fund (SELF):

SELF’s mission is to rebuild and empower underserved communities by providing access to affordable and innovative financing for sustainable home improvements, including energy efficiency; renewable energy; wind-hazard mitigation; water quality and water conservation projects, and more.

SELF has closed over 1,600 home improvement loans benefitting close to 6,000 people, of which 73 % are Low-to-Moderate income residents.

SELF finances the following types of projects for Florida homeowners:

Energy Efficiency: high-efficiency HVAC, weatherization, insulation, LED lights

Solar: solar PV panels, solar water heaters, solar attic fans, solar A/C systems

Water and Sewer: septic-to-sewer conversions, lateral line replacement, potable water hook-up, and plumbing repairs

Wind-Hazard Mitigation: roof repair or replacement, impact windows and doors, hurricane shutters

Disability Products: wheelchair ramps, walk-in-showers, accessibility

To learn more visit www.SolarEnergyLoanFund.org