

## **Decarbonization Download Vlog – Full Interview Transcript**

### **5 Questions with City of Orlando**

#### **Kelly**

Hey, everyone. Kelly Speakes-Backman here, and I am the acting Assistant Secretary at the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy [EERE] here at the Department of Energy. I'm here today with Ian Lahiff from the City of Orlando, and we're going to talk today about the City of Orlando's leadership and partnership with the Better Buildings Low Carbon Pilot. Ian, how are you doing?

#### **Ian**

Great. Thanks for having me today.

#### **Kelly**

Thanks for being here. First question, why is decarbonization so important to your organization?

#### **Ian**

Decarbonization is important because the transition to a clean energy future is one of the most important opportunities to improve our communities, boost job creation, enhance public health, and create a robust economy while working to mitigate some of the worst impacts of climate change, especially the ones we see here in central Florida.

Back in 2007, Mayor Dyer launched the Greenworks Initiative in an effort to transform Orlando into a future-ready city at the forefront of innovation. In a recent update to our Greenworks plan, the community-led stakeholder group came together and reset our targets and established an overarching decarbonization goal to power all city facilities from 100% renewable energy by the year 2030, along with all City fleet vehicles powered with electricity or alternative fuels by the year 2030.

We're really focused on three most impactful and cost-effective strategies. We're reducing our energy use and waste through high-efficiency technologies. We're increasing rooftop energy both on our rooftops and local community solar farms, and we're electrifying our buildings and our vehicles throughout the city fleet. In addition, the City has been recognized for some of this work. We recently received the LEED for Cities Gold Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, ranking Orlando as one of the leading cities advancing sustainability and climate action.

I'm also happy to share that just earlier this summer, the City received an award from the Better Buildings Challenge for achieving 23.4% reduction in overall energy consumption across nearly 6 million square feet of condition space.

#### **Kelly**

That is awesome. Congratulations on hitting more than 23% reduction. I want to ask you about

your stakeholders, the citizens of Orlando. What are they thinking about these activities? Do they care about decarbonization, or do they really just care about saving money from using less energy?

**Ian**

Everything that we do here at the City of Orlando from a strategic planning perspective is co-created with our community and stakeholders. However, the term decarbonization is not really mainstream in our neck of the woods. We've successfully engaged both our local citizens and small business owners to pass ordinances aimed electrifying our economy and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. We tend to frame these discussions as resilience and conservation measures.

The majority of energy in Florida is imported from other states. It's mostly coal and natural gas, and we believe that by encouraging energy efficiency measures in buildings and transit along with expanded renewable generation, we can create more local jobs and strengthen the local economy, all while moving on a path towards decarbonization for the City of Orlando.

**Kelly**

That is awesome. What are some of the initiatives and the projects that you're most excited about?

**Ian**

Some of the projects that I'm most excited about are our recent solar installations. We've spent the past couple of years focusing on getting our buildings optimized, getting them running in tip top shape, putting LED lights in, building automation systems, and installing high-efficiency HVAC. Now we're at the point that we're landing rooftop solar. We currently have over a megawatt of rooftop solar projects under management, and many of our fire stations are up and running with solar, which is completely funded and managed by the City, which is in contrast to some of our other unregulated markets in Florida.

We have a local regulated market, so we're really self-sufficient when it comes to solar here. We also have plans to install an additional 1.3 megawatts in the coming fiscal year, and our team is leveraging our community solar programs currently subscribed to 6.5 megawatts of community solar that powers Orlando City Hall, Orlando Police Department headquarters, a portion of our fire stations, neighborhood centers, and some of our city parks.

We recently won a grant to transform six neighborhood centers into what we're calling Resiliency Hubs. We're following the Urban Sustainability Directors Network guidebooks as far as how to turn a building into a resiliency hub. We also won \$2.85 million worth of HUD funding to improve our infrastructure in these community centers and better serve LMI [low- and moderate-income] communities following the next hurricane or grid outage event.

On the policy side, we've been working with my friends at City Hall to really push forward some unanimously passed building energy and water efficiency strategies. These are going to require

that any City-owned building more than 10,000 square feet, or any commercial or multifamily City-owned building over 50,000 square feet, is required to use the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager to obtain their energy and water benchmarking score. All of that data is required to be publicly transparent. This has already begun to spur a market transformation where buildings are investing in energy efficiency upgrades and reducing the overall emissions of these buildings.

Another more recent example of Orlando's decarbonization policies is how we're preparing for the rapid transition to zero-emission vehicles. Last month, our Mayor and City Council passed an EV-readiness code. So, starting January 1, 2022, all multifamily and commercial development will be required to incorporate a minimum level of EV readiness, including both installed charging stations and future proofing of the electrical capacity to install charging stations later down the line. As we know, demand for EV vehicles is going to continue to rise.

**Kelly**

You all are saving citizens money, helping them through emergencies, and working on saving the planet in the meantime – that's not a small feat. I wanted to ask you, what kind of challenges you see in reducing carbon emissions?

**Ian**

As a lot of other cities and local developers are seeing, supply chain issues are right at the forefront of an obstacle for our projects right now. Current supply chain issues are causing a change in a basis of design for some of our current solar installations and even projects that were permitted just a few weeks ago. Our contractors are having to scramble to find enough of the components to complete the scope of work. But we're confident that this is going to be a short-term obstacle and we'll be able to get through it.

As far as a longer-term challenge, we know that expanded rooftop solar of all City buildings is only one tool in the toolbox. Even though we've worked with the Department of Energy and NREL [National Renewable Energy Laboratory] to model a lot of our rooftops across the City, we need to work with the utilities really closely to be able to accelerate that transformational grid fuel mix towards more renewable sources and include distributed storage technologies to enhance our resilience.

**Kelly**

You all have done a lot of work so far. Congratulations. We really look forward to continuing that work with you here at DOE. What would you say to other cities that are considering taking up this kind of work?

**Ian**

First, you have to build capacity internally. At the City of Orlando, we have an interdisciplinary team that has developed the capacity to manage and implement complex projects. I would tell teams to focus on strategies that align with organizational and community stakeholder goals that are already in place. Establish strong partnerships with your local universities, utilities,

transit authorities, local governments, and others, not only to share in the successes but share in the effort, share in that lift to be able to reach those goals as well.

Our mayor Buddy Dyer likes to share that in order to become one of the best places to live, work, learn, and play, we need to be more focused on being environmentally friendly, socially equitable and inclusive, and positioning our city to lead the green economy of the future. If other cities and organizations desire to see these similar benefits, they should make conscious investments to improve energy efficiency and pursue decarbonization in buildings and fleet operations.

**Kelly**

Ian, I love it. Thank you so much for being here today and thank you for your work in being a leader in the city among cities. Really appreciate your time.

**Ian**

My pleasure. Thank you.