



For Immediate Release

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Cohoes NY “Floating Solar” Demonstration Project Advances in Congress

\$3 Million of Federal Investment Requested by Congressman Paul Tonko is included in Legislation Approved Today by House Appropriations Committee

National Demonstration Project would generate 100% of the City’s Municipal Buildings Electricity Needs with 8,000 Solar Arrays on its Water Reservoir

Cohoes, NY (July 16, 2021) – Plans by the City of Cohoes to generate clean energy by installing 8,000 “Floating Solar” panels on its water reservoir gained key support today, with the approval by the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations of legislation that contains \$3 million in funding for the national demonstration project

The federal investment, secured by U.S. Representative Paul Tonko, is included in the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies ([THUD](#)) [FY2022](#) Appropriations Bill, [reported out of the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations today](#). The bill now goes to the full House of Representatives for a vote.

“Cohoes’ municipally owned and operated floating solar project will offer untold potential in building smart, resource-efficient clean energy systems, and address climate and environmental justice issues all while driving down costs for the community,” Congressman Tonko said. “This visionary project can serve as a model to inspire countless other communities across America to make these sustainable investments in renewable energy infrastructure. I pushed for months to secure strong Congressional support for this worthy project, and I will not stop working to ensure it receives the federal dollars it deserves.”

“The Cohoes municipal floating solar demonstration project will allow us -- and the thousands of communities who follow our lead -- to generate clean power and economic opportunity. Producing clean energy on the surface of our city water reservoir will reduce our municipal buildings’ electricity bills to zero, allowing us to reinvest that savings back into our community,” Cohoes Mayor Bill Keeler said. “As a long-time advocate for clean energy and environmental justice, Congressman Tonko immediately understood the potential impact of our vision when we brought the Floating Solar idea to him more than a year ago, and he has guided and supported us every step of the way.”

The city’s proposed municipally owned and operated 3.2 MWdc Floating Solar demonstration project would be installed on its secured 10-acre water reservoir, at a cost of \$5.9 million. The city is seeking a total Federal share of \$4.788 million and a non-Federal share of \$1.209 million.

“This project would demonstrate that leveling the playing field by providing grants to municipalities — as an alternative option to current tax credits for private investments — for Floating Solar installations

would incentivize municipalities to invest in their own energy infrastructure in a sustainable way, while realizing the full economic benefits of doing so,” says Cohoes City Planner Joe Seman Graves. “The project may also spark interest in tapping appropriate water surfaces as a viable platform for solar energy generation.”

In a 2018 report, [National Renewable Energy Laboratory \(NREL\)](#) researchers estimated “installing floating solar photovoltaics on the more than 24,000 man-made U.S. reservoirs could generate about 10 percent of the nation’s annual electricity production.” The NREL report indicates there are 492 reservoirs in New York State, encompassing 134,425 acres of water suitable for Flotovoltaics. This could generate 16.4 TW-hr/yr.

If installed, the Cohoes Flotovoltaic (FV) clean energy installation would generate 100% of the city’s energy demand for its municipal facilities. The city’s current annual electricity cost is approximately \$660,000 annually. “Selling energy back to the grid, and reinvesting those savings into our community would have a generational impact on our residents,” Mayor Keeler says.

Given the available size of its water reservoir, the city will still have 40% of power-generating capacity to make available for other community purposes. “We are working to ensure that this project has the broadest positive impact on our community, including exploring the possibility of the Cohoes School District and or the Cohoes Housing Authority also benefitting from this clean energy,” Mayor Keeler said. Cohoes is a Low-Moderate Income (LMI) community with an Environmental Justice designation.

Floating solar arrays are a relatively new but proven technology used overseas - and in a limited way in the United States. Municipalities installing floating solar typically enter into either a lease agreement or a power purchase agreement with a third party non-government entity. “The private partnership approach facilitates overcoming up-front-cost barriers. However, the majority of the economic benefit, by way of tax credits and full life-cycle savings, accrues to the asset owner, which in this scenario is the private developer and not the municipality,” City Planner Seman-Graves says, indicating that it appears to be most economically advantageous over time (perhaps a novel approach in the United States) for the City to own and operate floating solar arrays on the Cohoes reservoir.

This transformative clean energy infrastructure proposal was developed in partnership with RETTEW Engineering and U.S. Floating Solar, and with other expert guidance.

The proposed CohoesNY Floating Solar Municipal Demonstration Project has garnered broad-based community support. Here are quotes from letters of support for the project:

New York State Senator Neil D. Breslin and Assemblymember John T. McDonald III wrote:

“Cohoes officials have astutely pointed out the funding inequities that currently act as a barrier for municipalities to own and operate their own photovoltaic (PV) system. We agree it is time to level that playing field. We commit to addressing these funding issues at the State level, while at the same time assisting Cohoes in navigating the essential state permitting processes required to ensure the safety and long-term viability of this important demonstration project.”

Solar expert, University at Albany Research Professor ASRC, Dr. Richard Perez

“Technically, this would be one of the first floating PV installations in the US, demonstrating intelligent use of space in a northeastern peri-urban environment. Floating PV has a demonstrably large potential for the country as attested by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory's research as well as our own peer reviewed research.”

Capital District Regional Planning Commission, Executive Director Mark Castiglione, AICP wrote:

“The Floating Solar array could be a true watershed project for the region, as several municipalities own water supplies and struggle with operational costs and energy challenges for water treatment. We envision

the Cohoes project as the perfect test bed for an innovative siting of solar facilities and we have no doubt additional communities would eagerly follow suit if and when this project is constructed and proves to be as successful as it has been modeled.”

Members of the Cohoes Common Council wrote:

“We support the Mayor's goal of seeking to generate 100% of our municipal facilities' electricity demand using "Floating Solar" energy, we welcome the opportunity to be a national model that may spark other similar communities to follow our lead, and we join in seeking your support for this transformative clean energy infrastructure proposal.”

Cohoes City School District Interim Superintendent Peggy O'Shea wrote:

“The Cohoes Floating Solar Demonstration Project will also enable us to provide additional educational experiences for our students. We plan on incorporating information regarding the development, installations and ongoing use of the floating solar installation into our Science programming. This will also allow us to highlight future career opportunities for our students.”

Chair of Cohoes Housing Authority, Mark Pascale wrote:

“As Chair of The Cohoes Housing Authority I would absolutely extend our interest in exploring this further in conjunction with Mayor Keeler and The City of Cohoes. Additionally, serving as a long standing member of The Cohoes School Board I can only imagine the profound educational opportunities and community pride for our students.”

A cross-section of local Cohoes developers wrote:

“This project will also create a buzz around all of the positive cleaner, greener measures that are being taken in the City, which we see as an attractor for people and businesses looking to relocate or just begin their journeys. Creating a sustainable economy is the smart thing to do economically and it is the right thing to do for the health and long-term sustainability of our community.”

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