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West End of St. Croix to Get Dedicated Electrical Service as FEMA Appropriates \$4 Million for First Phase of Microgrid and Battery Storage Project

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Dawn of new renewable energy technologies: modern, aesthetic and efficient dark solar panel panels, a modular battery energy storage system and a wind turbine system in warm light. Imagined through 3D rendering. By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Water and Power Authority said Friday that the first phase its plan to develop an 18-megawatt electrical microgrid, complete with a battery storage system, for the west end of St. Croix, has received an initial wave of federal funding. The monies will cover costs associated with the design and engineering of the project.

According to WAPA Interim Executive Director Noel Hodge, \$4.4 million was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency on April 2nd. "We are certainly pleased to see the first phase of this very important project approved for federal funding," he said. "WAPA can now begin the engineering studies and design of the St. Croix microgrid, which encompasses one component of the Authority's five-year Strategic Transformation Plan. The entire project, which is federally funded, will total more than \$129 million."

According to the release, WAPA's plan calls for the development of a more efficient, reliable and resilient electrical system using significant federal funds that have been designated for hazard mitigation projects in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes. It includes the addition of new generation at the territory's power plants, undergrounding of electrical equipment to at least 50% of utility customers, the addition of more wind and solar renewables and the installation of composite poles that can better withstand the effects of major windstorms.

"The authority will seek every opportunity to fund these system enhancements through federal grants. Our goal is to avoid asking our customers to foot the cost of these projects through higher rates," said Mr. Hodge.

Specifically, as it relates to the St. Croix west end microgrid, the project includes construction of a solar generation plant and a battery energy storage system. "The solar plant and battery system will introduce a renewable source of energy, increase the reliability of the electric grid and provide dedicated service to customers on the western end of the island," Mr. Hodge said. "When completed, the 18 megawatts generated by the microgrid will be coupled with four megawatts of renewable energy produced by the solar facility at Spanish Town to represent 50% of the daily power generation by renewables produced on St. Croix."

WAPA said approval of funding for phase one of the St. Croix microgrid comes as work is about to commence on four electrical underground projects, three on St. Croix and one on St. John. Additionally, at the end of March, approximately 3,400 of the newer composite poles have been installed across the territory. The pole project, which is slated for completion in 2024, is about 40% complete.

Not only do these projects seek to create a more robust electrical system, "WAPA is pursuing every opportunity for initiatives such as new and efficient power generation and the addition of solar and wind to reduce the utility's operating costs. Reduced operating costs will translate to lowering the cost of electrical service to all of our customers," Mr. Hodge said.