JAMESTOWN bpu BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

PO Box 700
Jamestown, NY 14702-0700
Phone (716) 661-1680
Fax (716) 661-1617

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Contact: Rebecca Robbins
661-1680

New York State Agency Grants $85,000 to BPU for Microgrid Feasibility Study

The New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) has granted $85,000 to the Jamestown Board of Public Utilities (BPU) as a result of an application submitted to the State's New York Prize Community Grid Competition.

The New York Prize program is a statewide endeavor to modernize New York's electric grid, spurring innovation and community partnerships with utilities, local government s and the private sector. Its goal is to enable utilities to create technological, operational and business models that will help communities reduce costs, promote clean energy and build reliability and resiliency in the grid.

The grant will fund a BPU feasibility study to determine if the utility could form its own microgrid. Microgrids are local energy networks that are able to separate from the larger electrical grid during extreme weather events or emergencies, providing power to individual customers and crucial public services such as hospitals, first responders and water treatment facilities. A microgrid is able to connect and disconnect from the grid to enable it to operate in both grid-connected or island mode.

Microgrids are not new but are not conventional backup power. According to the State, traditionally, microgrids have served only one user such as a university or hospital. NY Prize's community-based focus is to connect multiple users with more reliable and secure energy sources.

The study funded by the NYSERDA grant will assess the feasibility of a proposed microgrid for the Jamestown electric system, including engineering design, cost estimates, schedule and details of how the system would handle ownership, compensation and operation. The study will define specific improvements needed to enable the BPU to operate safely when disconnected from the high voltage electrical transmission system owned by National Grid which, under normal conditions, delivers electricity to the BPU system.

The work performed during the feasibility study will enable a phase 2 application to be submitted to NYSERDA by December 1 which would seek a higher level of funding assistance to allow implementation of a microgrid system to potentially begin in 2016.