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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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City Receives \$525,401 Grant to Support Emergency “Blackout” Operations

Northampton, MA – The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) has awarded Northampton a \$525,401 grant to help the City's emergency response network continue operations during long-term power outages. The program receiving the award is the “Batteries and PV Islanding Capability for Fire HQ” project. The grant will enable a large solar-electric array at the Fire Department Headquarters to operate during power outages.

“Recent major power outages like those that followed Hurricane Irene and the Halloween ice storm in 2011 have shown us how vulnerable our infrastructure is,” said Mayor David J. Narkewicz. “It is vital that our City be able to maintain essential services – particularly emergency response services – during these critical times. This grant will provide the City with an important resource.”

The Fire HQ is the only City facility able to provide a wide array of emergency services. The grant will significantly increase the facility's ability to operate during power outages. Over the next few months the City intends to contract with a third party to install, own, maintain and operate a solar array at the Fire HQ. This grant will enable the City to add stand-alone operating capabilities to the array.

Earlier this year DOER awarded the City a technical assistance grant to determine the feasibility of linking three of Northampton's highest-priority emergency facilities – Cooley Dickinson Hospital, the Red Cross regional emergency shelter at Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School and the Northampton Department of Public Works campus operation center – together in a “micro-grid” that would improve their ability to maintain operations during long-term power outages.

“As a result of climate change, we are increasingly called on to deal with the impact of these devastating storms, and these types of projects provide essential assistance, said Mayor Narkewicz. “But we need to go further, to do what we can to address the problem of climate change. So we're also working with DOER to fund projects that reduce our City's carbon footprint.”

Last month the DOER awarded the City \$181,393 to improve the energy efficiency of several City facilities. These improvements will reduce the City's energy consumption by almost \$50,000 a year.

In announcing the award, DOER referred to the City's application as “a viable, well developed project that meets the eligibility criteria of our Community Clean Energy Resiliency Initiative.”