

Dane County: To achieve 100% renewable energy status with new, large scale solar project

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Following the release this week of the 2020 Dane County Climate Action Plan (CAP), County Executive Joe Parisi announced today that Dane County has purchased land to build an additional large solar project and achieve 100% renewable electricity status for the County's operations. This newest solar project is expected to be nearly double the size of the soon-to-be constructed solar facility at the Dane County Regional Airport—a nine-megawatt (MW) project that will be the largest solar farm in Dane County. The renewable electricity from this new project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in an amount equivalent to the emissions produced by over 5,000 cars or the burning of 14,000 tons of coal per year.

“Our Climate Action Plan sets a county-wide goal to meet one-third of its electricity use with solar power by 2030,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “Dane County is proud to be a renewable energy leader in Wisconsin, taking bold steps to demonstrate that a climate resilient and carbon-free future is within our reach. Our new solar project will create local clean energy jobs and help combat climate change.”

The planned solar project will be located on a 125-acre tract of land in the Town of Cottage Grove, across from the Dane County Landfill and adjacent to the County's East District Highway Garage. The County plans to solicit proposals from prospective solar developers this fall, with design to start in 2021.

According to the Solar Foundation, an organization dedicated to advancing the use of solar and solar-compatible technologies, there are nearly 3,000 people employed in the solar industry in Wisconsin. In 2019, nearly 370 of those jobs were located in

Dane County. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit the economy and cause job loss, Dane County is hopeful large-scale solar projects like the ones set to take place at the Dane County Regional Airport and the Dane County Landfill will create much needed jobs in the community and help stimulate the local economy.

Dane County currently owns more solar than any other county in the state, generating more than 600 kilowatts (kW) of power at 16 county-owned facilities. In addition to the airport project, the County's recent solar installations include a 179 kW project at the Dane County Job Center, a 222 kW installation at the East District Highway Garage, and 19 kW of capacity on the Dane County Library Service Building (former home to the Blooming Grove Fire Department Station).

Additional installations are also being planned for the Sheriff's Training Center outside of Waunakee, parks equipment facilities, and Consolidated Food Services. An interactive "Clean Energy" map showcasing all of Dane County's existing projects is accessible from the Dane County Office of Energy and Climate Change's website at <https://daneclimateaction.org/>.

Renewable energy is also produced at the County-owned landfills, which will help achieve several goals outlined in the CAP. At the closed landfill in Verona, landfill biogas is used to run engines that generate electricity. Prior to April of 2019, this same process was used at the larger Rodefild Landfill. Due to the economic and clean transportation fuel benefits, the landfill biogas at the Rodefild landfill is now being processed into renewable natural gas (RNG) that is injected into the natural gas pipeline and powering fleets of RNG vehicles locally and across the United States.