

Bayfield Chamber and Visitor Bureau: Ashland Area Development Corporation goes solar

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Donated solar panels will allow the nonprofit organization to produce nearly all of its own energy

Ashland, Wis. – The Ashland Area Development Corporation (AADC) is installing 317 donated solar panels on its steel roof to create the area’s largest rooftop solar installation. The 120kW DC solar system will provide approximately 79% of the electricity needs of AADC on an annual basis. The panels were received through a combination of two grants from Solar for Good and from Nokomis Energy, a Minneapolis-based clean energy developer. The solar panels installed at the AADC will be interconnected to Xcel Energy’s grid.

The Solar for Good program, managed by RENEW Wisconsin, a clean energy policy nonprofit based out of Madison, Wis., donates solar panels to faith-based organizations and other qualifying nonprofits. AADC was awarded 150 panels through this program, which is funded through the generous support of the Couillard Foundation, a private philanthropic family also based in Madison. An additional 167 panels and a portion of the installation service has been donated to the AADC by Nokomis Energy. Founded to accelerate local, clean energy adoption in the Upper Midwest, the company has two employees who live in the Lake Superior-Chequamegon Bay region of northern Wisconsin. “Our goal is to bring the benefits of clean energy into our communities, now and for the future,” said Amber Vadnais, Project Manager at Nokomis Energy. “This project provides us with the perfect opportunity to do that in a very real way.”

Since 2017, Nokomis Energy has developed 250 acres of community solar projects across Minnesota. Buying bulk container-scale panels for these large projects sometimes results in surplus equipment, which the company donated to the AADC project.

This idea of community corporate sponsorship of nonprofits, sometimes called “community as a service,” is an exciting trend the Ashland area has capitalized on in renewable energy projects. The BRICK Ministries and New Day Advocacy Center both installed solar systems last year with donated solar modules from a private developer.

Additional equipment, electric wiring, switchgear and installation will be covered by capital provided by AADC and a pass-through low interest loan coordinated with the City of Ashland and the Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL). Jolma Electric of Ashland will be the installation contractor for the AADC project and hopes to complete the work before the winter season. Cheq Bay Renewables assisted in project development.