

Dane County Executive Parisi: Proposes \$10 million investment in clean fuel infrastructure as part of 2022 budget

Posted on Wednesday, Sep 29, 2021

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Today, County Executive Joe Parisi joined Operation Fresh Start Conservation Crew members and climate action advocates to announce a \$10 million investment in clean fuel infrastructure, as part of his 2022 budget proposal. Parisi also announced Dane County's intention to be net zero on carbon emissions for County buildings and fleets by 2030. These are Dane County's latest efforts to reduce emissions, increase renewable energy production, and capitalize financially on acting in the best interest of the planet.

"The flooding, fires, and extreme temperatures gripping the globe year after year offer irrefutable, tangible evidence we are in the midst of a climate crisis. We all have a responsibility to act now, and that's just what Dane County government is doing," said County Executive Parisi. "By investing in clean fuel infrastructure and becoming net zero in carbon emissions for our buildings and fleet by 2030, Dane County will be a leading voice of what is possible for the public and private sectors to help combat the disturbing trends of climate change."

The renewable fuel injected into the pipeline at the Dane County Landfill comes from rotting trash and renewable natural gas brought in from manure digesters. It powers trucks and vehicles across the region, reducing diesel and carbon emissions. In fact, since Dane County launched its compressed natural gas (CNG) initiative years ago, almost half of its fleet of 60 highway snowplows are now powered by

CNG. Across all of county government, there are now 100 CNG vehicles and 17 electric vehicles and hybrids. County Executive Parisi's 2022 budget expands this initiative with over \$5 million for the purchase of CNG trailers to help fuel up the Dane County Highway fleet in areas of the county where compressed natural gas filling stations are less available.

Additionally, Parisi is including nearly \$2 million for installation of a new CNG filling station at the Fish Hatchery Road Highway garage and \$3.2 million for the purchase of eight more CNG powered snow plows. All told, this more than \$10 million investment in clean fuel infrastructure further reduces Dane County's reliance on diesel and expands the reach of renewables into more rural parts of the county. This will make Dane County's fleet of plows more efficient, both in their energy consumption and reduced time needed for refueling.

Dane County's Renewable Natural Gas plant is on track for a record year of clean burning fuel production and revenue generation. The facility that converts gas from the landfill into compressed natural gas for vehicle fuel is projected to displace 4,750,000 gallons of gasoline this year, reducing emissions equivalent to traveling 106 million miles less on the road. The impact on carbon emission reductions is the same as planting 700,000 trees.

A little over a year from now, Dane County will be on the cusp of being the first public entity of its size in the region to generate more renewable electricity than it uses. Through a partnership with Alliant Energy, construction is slated to begin after the first of the year on a more than 100-acre solar farm on county land near the Renewable Natural Gas production facility off Highway 12. This project will be managed by a Wisconsin company and, when complete, will generate over 17-megawatts of electricity, enough energy to power 3,100 homes per year. Perhaps more importantly, this installation combined with the county's solar partnership with Madison Gas Electric at the Dane County Regional Airport, along with close to 20 solar developments at county facilities, will result in Dane County producing more renewable energy than the total amount of electricity County government consumes for its operations.

Yesterday, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced Dane County as

one of just five 2021 Green Power Leadership Award winners in the United States. Dane County is the only local government awardee or recipient from the Midwest in 2021. For more than 20 years, EPA's annual Green Power Leadership Awards have recognized America's leading green power users for their commitment and contribution to helping advance the development of the nation's voluntary green power market. The award recognizes Dane County's efforts to transition both its own operations to clean electricity as well as the County's efforts to encourage local governments, businesses, and individuals to invest in clean power.

As Dane County amasses its renewable energy credit portfolio, it is critical efforts be monitored in real time to maximize both the environmental and economic benefits of the investments Dane County makes. Parisi's 2022 budget creates a new Renewables Finance Officer position in the Department of Waste and Renewables to compile and manage the data that corresponds with this innovative work.

County Executive Parisi is also including over \$93,000 in his budget to jumpstart the creation of a Civilian Climate Corps. Modeled after Dane County's highly successful Dane County Conservation Crews, Operation Fresh Start will use these start-up funds to build partnerships and develop a team of young people dedicated to working on energy efficiency projects. This may include winterizing buildings or helping to make other modifications to reduce carbon emissions or increase renewable energy production. By launching this work now, Operation Fresh Start will be well positioned to become part of the new proposed federal Climate Corps, a 10 year, \$10 billion initiative to tackle climate change.

A couple of years ago, Dane County launched the Continuous Cover Program, a first of its kind effort to help maintain the rural character and landscape of the fast growing county that helps reduce runoff and erosion, keep farmers and growers on the land, and helps trap carbon. Interested landowners voluntarily enter into long term agreements with Dane County to convert their lands into grasses and prairies. The program has helped protect 1,600 acres of land across the county so far. Parisi is increasing this investment to \$2.5 million in his 2022 budget to help convert and conserve even more lands. Interest in Continuous Cover remains high, and these additional dollars will help Dane County move quicker on accomplishing the shared goals of reducing the risk of flooding and trapping more carbon.

Dane County's Conservation and Lake Preservation and Renewal funds have protected thousands of acres over the past decade. They are also critical to Dane County becoming a net carbon neutral community. The path Dane County is taking to be 100% renewable with its energy consumption is the blueprint for it to achieve carbon neutrality. Conservation efforts will be integral to this next achievement, which Dane County believes can be accomplished by 2030 or sooner. Parisi is creating a new position in the Department of Land and Water Resources to help compile all of county government's carbon reduction accomplishments. An additional new position will design and implement conservation projects that both improve water quality and sequester carbon.

The County's 2019 investment in a 160-acre addition to the Pheasant Branch Conservancy is a good demonstration for how its Conservation Fund is the perfect vehicle to develop a carbon offset program and enhance water quality. When fully restored, the property will help prevent 2.6 million gallons of rainwater and 500 pounds of phosphorus from running directly into Lake Mendota each year, while also giving the public a beautiful destination for hiking and other outdoor activities. County Executive Parisi is increasing funding for Dane County's Conservation Fund by an additional \$1 million, bringing the total to \$6 million available for land preservation work in 2022. Dane County's continued leadership on conservation will pay dividends far beyond this generation for quality of life, water quality, flood mitigation, and the pollinators and other species impacted by the fast changing world they call home.