

Taking (and Paying for!) Climate Action

League of Minnesota Cities Conference
June 26, 2025

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Jason Ludwigson, City of La Crescent
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Minnesota
Gold Leaf



Presentation Overview

- **Gold Leaf Challenge Overview**
- **City Success Stories**
 - **St. Anthony Village**
 - **City of La Crescent**
- **How to Pay for Climate Projects**
- **Q&A and Discussion**



Minnesota
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The Gold Leaf Challenge





WHO CAN JOIN?

- **Cities**
- **Counties**
- **Tribal Nations**
- **Townships**
- **Neighborhoods**
- **Homeowners Associations (HOAs)**
- **County/State Fairgrounds**
- **Schools**
- **Etc. Whatever community means to you!**

HOW TO JOIN



Check out mngoldleaf.org or email greenstep@state.mn.us



Start with a Green Team of people in your community ready to take action. There is no formal resolution to join Gold Leaf.



Take actions based on the 44 high-impact, high-priority actions across mitigation, adaptation, planning, and community connectedness



Report your current actions and get a Gold Leaf Award and connection with communities taking action across Minnesota!





Gold Leaf Challenge and Climate Plan Projects

League of MN Cities
Conference Session
June 26, 2025

Our Community

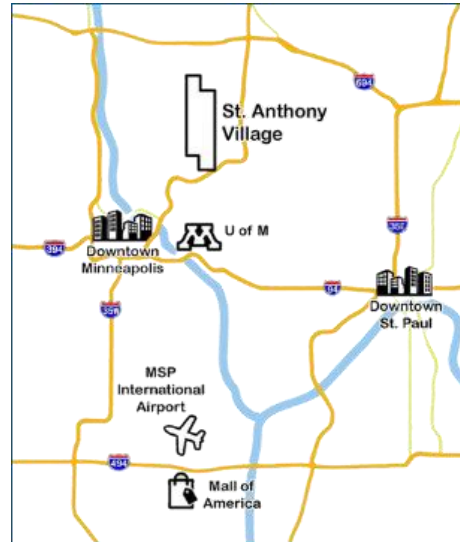
First-ring suburb of Minneapolis

Approximately 9,200 residents

Located in both Hennepin and Ramsey County

2.35 square miles

Majority residential; some retail & commercial



Sustainability History



savmn.com/sustainability



Water Reuse Facility, 2008



500,000 gallon storage tank capacity

First of its kind at the time of construction

Irrigates Central Park, City Hall campus

Reduces amount of drinking water used for irrigation by 5 million gallons/year (~\$12,000 annual savings)

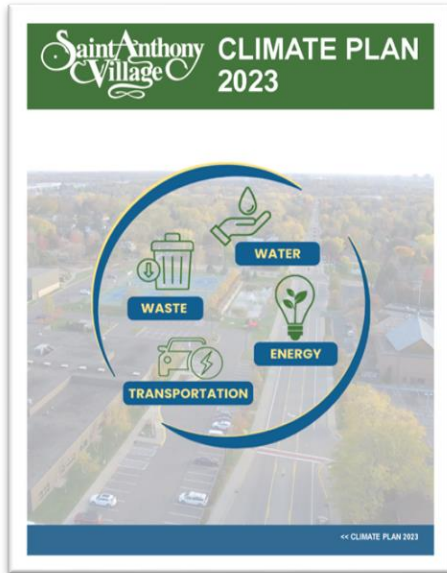


Sustainability Highlights

YEAR	HIGHLIGHTS
2011	Joined MN GreenStep Cities Program
2012	Sustainability Plan written by UMN students
2014	Installed bio-filtration storm water treatment including pollinator habitat
2015	Installed additional stormwater treatment systems
2015	Joined Community Solar Subscriber Collaborative; Partnered with MWMO on Regional Stormwater Treatment and Research Facility
2017	Became a Step 5 GreenStep City, one of first cities to achieve top tier
2018	Partnered with Ramsey County to open organic food scraps recycling drop-off at City Hall
2019	Achieved SolSmart Silver Community Recognition
2020	Adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan (greenhouse gas emission goals & sustainability chapter)
2023	Adopted 5-year Climate Plan in December
2024	Hired City's first Sustainability Coordinator



2023 Climate Plan



FOCUS AREA	VISION
Water	Increase the strength of the community by protecting and preserving the City's water resources.
Waste	Protect the health and viability of St. Anthony village well into the future by reducing the volume of waste sent to landfills.
Energy	Re-envision City-wide energy practices to reduce City-wide CO2 emissions by 80% and City facility CO2 emissions by 100% by 2040.
Transportation	Reduce the emissions produced from travel by enhancing multimodal transportation opportunities and improving access to EVs.



Journey to the Gold Leaf Challenge

2011	Joined GreenStep Cities
2017	Step 5 GreenStep City
2023	Climate Plan adopted in December
2023	Gold Leaf pilot program participant
2024	Year 1 of Climate Plan implementation and Gold Leaf





Current Climate Plan Projects



Rooftop Solar Installations

ENERGY INITIATIVE: Increase usage of renewable energy

Explore solar panel installation on public facilities.

Seek funding from utility providers and government programs, integrate implementation costs into the annual budget.



Water Treatment Facility

System Type	# of Panels	Panels	Inverter	System Size (W DC)
Ballast Roof Mount	74	Jinko 580W	SolarEdge	42,920

Total System Cost	\$106,910
SPB Grant (60%)	\$64,146
Direct Pay (30%)	\$32,073
City Capital Fund - Buildings (10%)	\$10,691



Water Treatment Facility

Current kWh Usage vs. Expected Solar Production

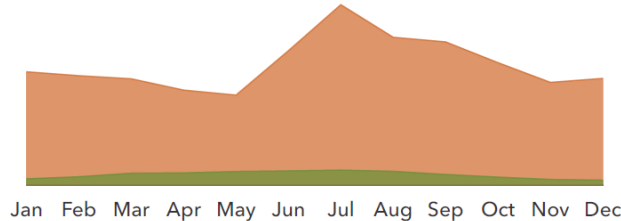
Production Estimate from PVWatts®

With 24% System Losses Modeled

Current Electric Usage	579,200 kWh*
Solar Electric Production	48,326 kWh

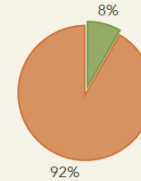
*Xcel allows for solar interconnection up to 120% of this value - subject to final usage reporting during interconnection review

- Solar Production Data
- Customer Usage & Pricing



Utility Energy Savings

- Free Solar Energy
- Utility Energy Bill



Current Annual kWh Electric Charges	\$47,192
Year 1 kWh Savings from Solar	\$3,938
Total kWh Usage Offset	8%



Public Works Building

SAV - Public Works Building

Proposed Solar Array Layout

System Type	# of Panels	Panels	Inverter	System Size (W DC)
Ballast Roof Mount	89	Jinko 580W	SolarEdge	51,620

Total System Cost	\$109,069
SPB Grant (60%)	\$65,441
Direct Pay (30%)	\$32,721
City Capital Fund - Buildings (10%)	\$10,907



Public Works Building

Current kWh Usage vs. Expected Solar Production

Production Estimate from PVWatts®

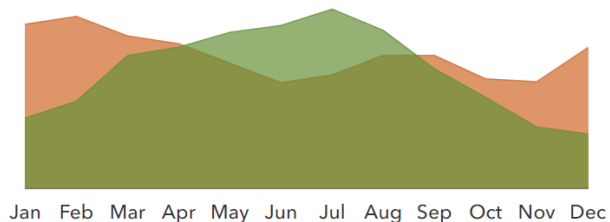
With 24% System Losses Modeled

Current Electric Usage 65,480 kWh*

Solar Electric Production 57,820 kWh

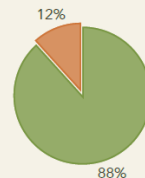
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■ Solar Production Data
■ Customer Usage & Pricing



Utility Energy Savings

● Free Solar Energy
● Utility Energy Bill



Current Annual kWh Electric Charges \$5,335

Year 1 kWh Savings from Solar \$4,711

Total kWh Usage Offset **88%**



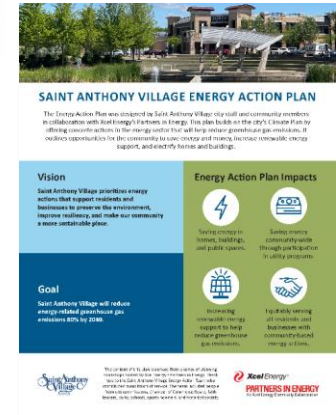
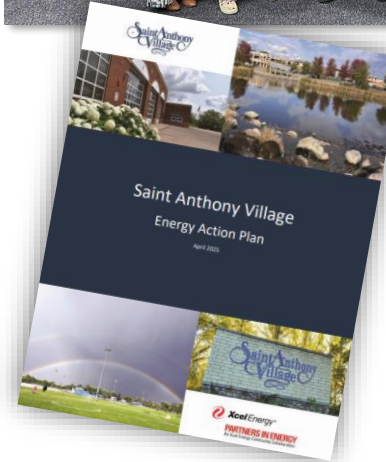
Partners in Energy

ENERGY INITIATIVE:

Improve the efficiency of homes, businesses, and public facilities in Saint Anthony Village

2024: Discuss participating in Partners in Energy Program and creating an Energy Action Plan

2025: City Council approves plan.



Active Transportation Planning

TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE:

Improve accessibility and safety of non-motorized transportation infrastructure

Develop a bike and pedestrian plan to create specific goals and infrastructure opportunities

Participate in regional planning initiatives



What's Next?

2026: Climate Plan water and waste strategies

Develop ordinances for sustainable building, EV charging for multi-family and commercial properties

Education and public engagement

Continued Gold Leaf and GreenStep Cities participation



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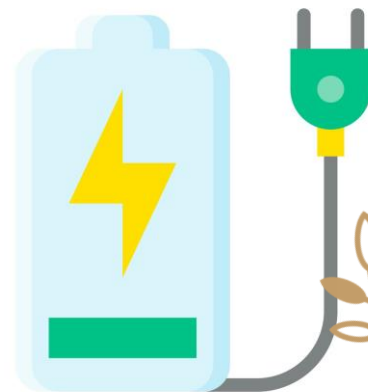


THANK YOU

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Gold Leaf Challenge

City of La Crescent



La Crescent's Journey to the Gold Leaf Challenge Program

What We'll Cover:

- Native Prairie
- Solar
- Carbon Reduction Program
- Tree Stewards
- EV Charging + Policies EV Ordinance
- SolSmart Platinum
- Charging Smart Silver
- Native Landscaping Permit



Native Prairies

- Pollinator Prairies
 - La Crescent has worked in partnerships (MnDOT, Natural Resources Conservation Services, and Board of Water and Soil Resources) to establish pollinator prairie projects on city property and MnDOT ROW
- Biodiversity
 - Provide habitat for a wide variety of native plants & wildlife
- Soil Health
 - Enrich soil with organic matter
 - Provide carbon sequestration
- Low Maintenance
 - Reduced mowing costs
 - Reduced wear on equipment



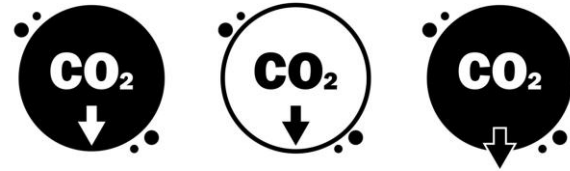
La Crescent Solar

- Locations
 - Fire Station (2017), Public Works (2020), Radium Plant (2020), Animal Shelter (2020) - planned for Aquatic Center (2025)
- Funding
 - All systems installed via no up front cost lease w/option to purchase at a later date
- PV Power
 - 4 systems have generated 862,600 mWh of electricity in their lifetimes



Carbon Reduction Program

- 2021 IJJA Law
 - Reduce carbon emissions from surface transportation
 - Projects funded based on cost-effectiveness; co-benefits such as equity, safety, access, public health
- 2 vehicles
 - Electric police cruiser
 - Public works director EV
- Tax exempt municipal lease
 - City used this mechanism to procure the vehicles
 - 80% federal cost share, 20% local cost



Tree Stewards

- Designed to educate & promote volunteerism in tree care
- Grant-funded by the USDA Forest Service & MN DNR
 - Free of charge to communities
- One-day training by UMN staff
 - Tree planting
 - Pruning
 - Watering techniques
 - Identify pests/diseases
- Offers follow-up training every 3 years



La Crescent joined the program in 2022

EV Charging + Policies EV Ordinance

- EV charging
 - 80% of EV charging occurs at home, usually overnight
 - Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 stations
 - First city in SE MN to install public level 2 EV charger
- 2022, La Crescent adopted an EV Ordinance
 - Support EV infrastructure + clean transportation



SolSmart Platinum

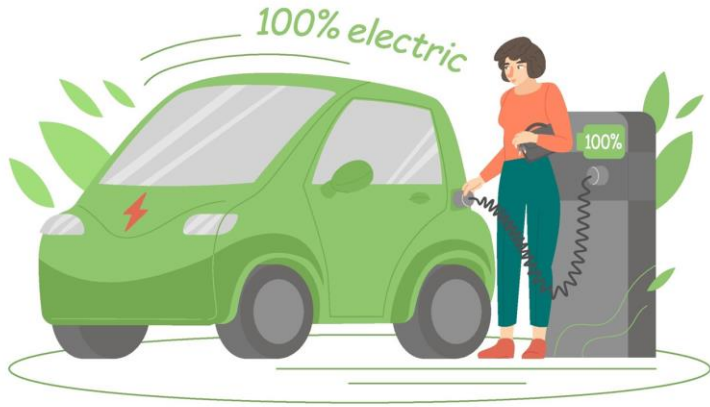


Growing from River to Ridge

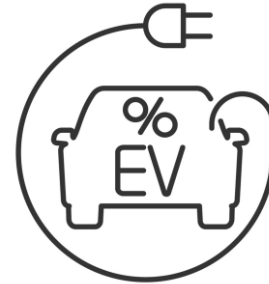
- SolSmart
 - Encourages affordable solar energy options
 - Supports solar workforce development
 - Assist in solar permitting, zoning, inspection processes
- 2024, La Crescent designated platinum
 - Automated solar permitting platform SolarApp+
 - Collaborated with local organizations to serve disadvantaged communities
 - Provided online summaries of policies, guides, options for solar



Charging Smart Silver



- Charging Smart
 - Assists cities in achieving EV goals
 - Guides zoning, electrification, charger installations
 - Communities can earn Bronze, Silver, or Gold
- 2024, La Crescent received silver designation



Gold Leaf Challenge



Accomplishments to Date

- CC1- Combined Green Team
- CC5- Community Restoration
- CC8- Tree Steward
- CM7- Alternatives to Car Travel
- CM12- Community Renewable Energy Projects
- CP10- Climate Staff
- CA5- Resilient Trees
- CA7- Drought Tolerance
- Communities can earn Bronze, Silver, or Gold



Questions?

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Slides created by May Saize Xiong - University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment Summer Intern





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Funding for Climate Projects





Tried-and-True Funding Options

- **General Fund**
- **Municipal Bonds**
- **State Grants**
 - *Example:* Solar on Public Buildings Grant - open now for communities in Xcel service territory! **Due June 30**
- **Energy Savings Performance Contracts**
 - *Examples:* City of Bemidji, White Bear Lake Schools, Dakota County
- **Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) Seed Grants**
 - \$5-10K – RFP will open this fall



Direct Pay (AKA “Elective Pay”)

- Mechanism for tax-exempt entities to take advantage of clean energy tax credits
- Local governments can receive a **cash refund** for part of **solar, geothermal, EV charging** projects and **EV purchases**
- Outlook for the clean energy tax credits after 2025 is uncertain, but if your community has done a **solar project or purchased an EV in 2024 or 2025** – you are likely eligible to receive a cash refund



Burnsville PD EV - \$7,500 refund



Robbinsdale water treatment plant solar - \$64,200 (30% of project cost)



Minnesota Climate Innovation Finance Authority

- MnCIFA = state “green bank” established as a state agency in 2023
- Created to “stimulate the development of **clean energy and greenhouse gas emissions reduction projects** by using innovative financing tools to leverage private and public capital.”
- Visit tinyurl.com/MNgreenbank to learn more





How to Establish Sustainable Revenue Sources?

- One option = **franchise fees**
- Paid on energy bills - utilities collect fees from customers and pass them to the city
- 141 MN cities have a franchise agreement; many use franchise fee revenues for streets and other infrastructure improvements

ELECTRICITY CHARGES		RATE: Net Energy Billing Svc		
DESCRIPTION	USAGE UNITS	RATE	CHARGE	
Basic Service Chg			\$10.00	
Basic Service Chg			\$3.40	
Energy Charge Summer	297 kWh	\$0.103010	\$30.59	
Energy Charge Summer	0 kWh	- \$0.151850	\$0.00	
Windsorce Program	297 kWh	\$0.035300	\$10.48	
Fuel Cost Charge	297 kWh	\$0.041717	\$12.39	
Fuel Cost Charge	297 kWh	- \$0.041717	- \$12.39	CR
Res Savers Switch AC			- \$6.44	CR
Affordability Chrg			\$0.98	
Resource Adjustment			\$4.32	
Interim Rate Adj			\$3.04	
Subtotal			\$56.37	
City Fees		5.00%	\$2.65	
Transit Improvement Tax		0.50%	\$0.28	
City Tax		0.50%	\$0.28	
County Tax		0.15%	\$0.09	
State Tax		6.875%	\$3.83	
Total			\$63.50	

Sample Xcel electric residential bill



Franchise Fees

- At least four cities are using franchise revenues to fund sustainability and climate work:
 - **City of Eagan** - raises \$1.7 million/year; costs \$1.85/month for residential customers
 - Sustainability coordinator, climate plan + implementation
 - **City of Edina**
 - Bike and pedestrian infrastructure, other sustainability work
 - **City of Hopkins**
 - Sustainability staff and Hopkins Climate Solutions Fund
 - **City of Minneapolis**
 - Climate Legacy Initiative



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Q&A





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Thank you!

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