

CASE STUDY: EDINA, MINNESOTA - FOSTERING RENEWABLE ENERGY THROUGH INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION



Proving that you don't have to be in a sunny climate to use sun power, the city of Edina, Minnesota, is a leader in solar energy use as part of its overall efforts to promote renewable energy. The city recently earned the prestigious SolSmart Gold designation, becoming the third city in the Twin Cities Metro Area to signal it is "open for solar business."

What does this designation mean for Edina? As a SolSmart designee, the city has completed a thorough review of its processes, codes, regulations, and much more so that residents and businesses have a streamlined process for going solar. Efforts included ensuring solar permits are turned around in three business days or less, providing an online inspection scheduling platform, and building a community solar garden on its public works building. These actions drive solar business, local development, and jobs to the community.

Edina's highly dedicated staff and supportive residents are focused on making their city a leader in renewable energy. As Casey Casella, a city management fellow who worked diligently on this SolSmart effort, said in an interview with the [Sun Current](#), "City staff have worked for over a year with a critical eye toward our processes and ordinances. We are proud to encourage solar in our community and look forward to future innovation in renewable technologies."

Community Solar Garden

Edina's goal is to have renewable energy be vital to the fabric of the community. The city is the proud host of the Edina Community Solar Garden, located on roof of the Edina Public Works Building. Another first is that this community solar garden serves residential subscribers of all income levels, with a total of 68 households taking advantage of this energy source. All of the

possible because of a commitment by and collaboration between the city of Edina, Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light (which partners with faith communities to address the effects of climate change), and Cooperative Energy Futures (an energy co-op).

The idea of a community solar garden began with the city's Energy and Environment Commission looking at options to make the city a leader in using renewable energy. The commission knew it wouldn't be easy to get off the ground because finding proper acreage for the solar garden in the dense city would be a challenge. City project workers Megan O'Hara and Tara Brown were introduced to the community solar garden project and they worked closely with Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light.



Gaining Resident Buy In

O'Hara and Brown had to ensure that residents knew about the solar garden project and supported it, and that all 68 households subscribed within a six-month period in order to procure the needed project funding. The community solar garden contract with each household requires a commitment of 25 years and, if someone moves before 25 years, the homeowner would have to pay a fine and the next person on the waiting list would become a new community solar garden member. This made the contract fair and equitable for every household, regardless of income. "At the end of the day, the solar garden would not have been created had we not had residents sign up to be subscribers," Brown told a reporter for the [local high school newspaper](#).

Cooperative Energy Futures is the developer of the community solar garden and the only developer in the state to develop solar gardens for low-to-moderate-income households. It is also an investor in solar gardens throughout the greater Minneapolis area. The goal was to have participants of the solar garden pay less for their electricity and have the added benefit of supporting an environmentally friendly way to source their energy.

Financing the Project

Financing for the project was made possible because Edina residents subscribed early in support of the effort, affirming to the banks that this was a worthy investment. Cooperative Energy Futures has leased the roof space from Edina for 25 years for this 618kW solar garden and installed 1,926 solar panels. O'Hara said in the student newspaper [interview](#), "Part of the beauty of this model is that it serves people no matter their income level. As long as you have an electric bill, no matter how small, you can offset the electricity costs by paying a similar amount to Cooperative Energy Futures."

Another commitment made by the city is to serve as the backup subscriber to the community solar garden. This means the city will purchase portions of the electricity produced by the community solar garden should subscribers unexpectedly leave the program, ensuring that electricity from this source continues to be cheaper, the community solar garden thrives without interruption, and the financial risks to Cooperative Energy Futures are mitigated.

Edina's community solar garden opened in late 2018 and is now fully utilized, with a waiting list. The city also is proud to share its road to success with other communities and will be monitoring its progress as it continues to focus on renewable energy efforts.

[Click here to learn more about Edina's efforts in the SolSmart program](#)

This case study was written by SolSmart team member Usha Ramamurthy, Director of the National Civic League's Sustainability Program.

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SOLSMART IS FUNDED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY SOLAR ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES OFFICE.

