



Saint Louis County

Administration • 100 North Fifth Avenue West, Room 202 • Duluth, MN 55802
Phone: (218) 726-2450 • Fax: (218) 726-2469 • www.stlouiscountymn.gov

Kevin Z. Gray
County Administrator

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Dana Kazel, Communications Manager
(218) 725-5049 office • (218) 591-2219 cell

Solar energy project partners County with Minnesota Power and NRRI

Renovations to make St. Louis County's Government Services Center (GSC) more energy efficient have led to the installation of photovoltaic (PV) electrical energy generating systems on the building's roof. More commonly known as solar panels, the three different PV systems are part of a unique solar energy research partnership involving the county, Minnesota Power and UMD's Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI). A news conference to highlight the research project and its expected benefits will be held Wednesday, February 19, at 10:30 a.m., on the GSC's roof.

As part of the design process for the GSC project, the county looked at various energy conservation options to make the 33-year-old, seven-story building more efficient. By adding solar panels, the county will draw on a renewable energy source and reduce long term utility costs.

Working with Minnesota Power and NRRI, the county purchased and installed three different kinds of photovoltaic systems. NRRI, as a neutral agency, will monitor energy output and report data regarding the three systems' operations, measuring and calculating how well each type of system performs on an urban office building site in the northland. Minnesota Power, which provided significant funding for the project, will be able to use the insights gained as part of its ongoing efforts to educate customers about energy efficiency and solar energy solutions as an effective combination to meet sustainability objectives. The research will be conducted over a three year period. This study will serve as a roadmap for applying PV solar in residential and community settings, while providing valuable supplemental information to existing solar studies from around the nation by using region-specific results.

"This is a great collaborative effort that, in the end, will save energy and save money for our tax payers," said Tony Mancuso, property management director for St. Louis County. "We are thankful to have great community partners like Minnesota Power and NRRI. When this study is

complete, St. Louis County will keep the solar panels, which together can generate approximately 30,000 watts of electricity.”

The three systems together cost \$170,000. Minnesota Power, through a combination of conservation program research dollars, design assistance, and SolarSense rebates, contributed nearly \$116,000, covering more than two-thirds of the cost. Two of the three systems are Minnesota made. The third system is a commodity panel currently prevalent in the marketplace.

“St Louis County has been a significant participant in our Power of One energy saving programs for its facilities, to the benefit of county operations and our system as a whole,” said Margaret Hodnik, Vice President Regulatory and Legislative Affairs for Minnesota Power. “This project is a tremendous opportunity for us to work with the county and NRRI to develop research-based information on how different kinds of PV panels perform in our region. The results will help us provide sound information through our solar program to other customers who may be interested in solar energy.”

“This project will be both a qualitative and quantitative study of the impacts that renewable energy systems like solar photovoltaic can have in a community,” said Matt Mlinar, NRRI Research Coordinator. “What are the environmental and economic impacts locally, and how well do solar photovoltaic systems perform in a Northern Minnesota climate? We hope the results will serve as a roadmap for solar photovoltaic power applications in future residential projects.”

The GSC, located at 320 West Second Street in downtown Duluth, receives more public visitors each year than any other county building. It houses numerous county departments, including Public Health and Human Services, Land and Minerals, and Information Technology. Once renovations are complete, the building will also house Probation offices and Planning and Community Development. St. Louis County purchased the building from the State of Minnesota in 2002. Renovations began last fall and are expected to take nearly two years to complete, with a total price tag of \$21 million.

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Please note: any media planning to attend the news conference should meet near the elevators on the main floor of the GSC. County staff will be available to escort you to the roof.