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Dane County's Community-Wide Climate Action Plan Being Shared with Governor's Task Force on Climate Change

Dane County's first community-wide Climate Action Plan is being shared with the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, County Executive Parisi announced today. Parisi recently sent the Climate Action Plan to the Governor Evers' Task Force on Climate Change, offering the group to review the plan and prioritize energy efficiency and solar energy at state facilities so the State of Wisconsin can lead by example.

"Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our generation," said County Executive Joe Parisi. "Dane County is happy to share its Climate Action Plan and work on renewables so that Wisconsin can reemerge as a leader on this vital issue. We are proud to be a renewable energy leader in Wisconsin and take bold steps to demonstrate that a climate resilient and carbon-free future is within our reach."

Dane County's Climate Action Plan sets a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) 50% county-wide by 2030 and puts the county on a path to be carbon-neutral by 2050. It provides a roadmap of recommended policies and projects to be pursued county-wide to achieve emission reduction targets. The plan outlines strategies to reduce energy use in buildings, increase the supply of renewable energy, and reduce emissions from the transportation and waste sectors.

For more than a decade, Dane County has invested in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to lead by example. Ongoing efforts to pursue clean, green energy alternatives include:

- 16 operating solar installations at county facilities, totaling 600 kW.
- 9 MW County/MGE solar farm under construction at the Dane County Airport that will supply 40% of county facilities with renewable electricity.
- A newly proposed 18 MW solar facility on county-owned land east of the Rodefild landfill that will help achieve 100% renewable electricity status for county operations.
- Landfill renewable natural gas (RNG) facility that converts landfill gas into RNG, which is then used to fuel more than half of the county's heavy-duty trucks.
- RNG Station receiving biogas from manure digesters that capture methane and phosphorus from manure, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions and harmful runoff to lakes and streams.
- Over 100 miles of bike trails in the county, including \$15 million in investments in off-road bike trails, \$4.7 million to local communities for bike lanes via PARC grants, and \$17 million in investments in shoulder lane improvements since 2011.
- \$2.5 million in grants to local landowners to promote continuous cover crops.

Many clean energy resources currently cost less than the fossil-fuel alternatives and the clean energy resources also create more local jobs, leading to increased economic benefits associated with climate action. According to the Solar Foundation, there were nearly 3,000 people employed in the solar industry in Wisconsin in 2019. Nearly 370 of those jobs were located in Dane County. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit the economy and cause job loss, Dane County is hopeful large-scale solar projects like the ones set to take place at the Dane County Regional Airport and the Dane County Landfill will create much needed jobs in the community and help stimulate the local economy.

Parisi writes in his letter to the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, "As you consider all the ways the State can lead on climate action, I urge you to work with local energy utilities to invest in solar projects that can reduce the state's operating costs, accelerate solar markets, and demonstrate the state's commitment to climate action." He adds, "It is vital that governments lead by example; because Dane County walks the talk, we can encourage residents and businesses to take action too. The State of Wisconsin should adopt a similar strategy."

New climate modeling by UW-Madison scientists was published for the first time in Dane County's Climate Action Plan. It predicts that southern Wisconsin will continue to get hotter and wetter over time. The scientists predict that by 2050 30 to 40 summer days will reach over 90 degrees. Historically, 10-15 days a year have high temperatures above 90 degrees.

Climate change threatens to exacerbate existing health conditions and create new health threats associated with air quality, vector-borne illnesses, and extreme weather events. Dane County is already experiencing more frequent extreme rainfall events that lead to flooding and larger runoff events fueling algae blooms in area lakes and rivers. An increase in temperatures can lead to heat related illness and loss of species. Taking action on climate change can create health benefits and help communities adapt to changes, becoming more resilient to threats. Reducing climate change emissions will also help reduce loss of infrastructure and provide safe water.

The County Executive and the Office of Energy & Climate Change first convened the Dane County Council on Climate Change in July of 2017. The group was comprised of 38 members, including representatives from county government, local government, energy and water utilities, business, labor, social and environmental advocacy groups, and UW-Madison to participate in the creation of a Climate Action Plan. Subject matter experts developed recommendations, which were then presented to the Dane County Council on Climate Change for inclusion in the Climate Action Plan.

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