



City of River Falls News Release

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RIVER FALLS TO CREATE A COMMUNITY SOLAR GARDEN

River Falls Municipal Utilities customers will soon have the option of purchasing homegrown sustainable energy generated in a local solar garden.

River Falls is one of two communities chosen to pilot a strategic community solar garden initiative by WPPI Energy. Together, the 51 not-for-profit community-owned member utilities of WPPI Energy are pursuing the pilot projects in New Richmond and in River Falls as a first step toward providing their customers even more energy options.

City Administrator Scot Simpson remarked, "River Falls is a national renewable energy leader. That is possible only through the leadership of the City Council, Utility Advisory Board, and Powerful Choices committee along with the voluntary participation of our customers in the variety of programs offered by the utility.

"Customers have made it clear they want renewable energy options and this is one of the ways we're providing it" said Mike Noreen, Conservation and Efficiency Coordinator for River Falls Municipal Utilities. He also added "River Falls was chosen because the community has demonstrated a strong sustainability ethic through high participation rates in voluntary conservation, efficiency and renewable energy programs".

The solar garden will likely be located in the new Sterling Ponds Corporate Park.

Community solar gardens are groupings of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels that use the sun's energy to generate electricity for multiple users. Participating customers subscribe to receive the output from one or more panels, receive the benefits of PV technology and the efficiencies associated with a larger-scale project without having to own, host or maintain the equipment on their own property. Subscribers receive a monthly bill credit for the energy their panels produce.

“Customers today are increasingly interested in solar energy,” says WPPI Energy Vice President of Energy Services Jake Oelke. “As community-owned, customer-focused and experienced renewable energy leaders, WPPI Energy member utilities are well positioned to deliver those opportunities.”

It is expected that, depending upon the number of panels each subscriber chooses, approximately 50 utility customers will be able to participate in the 100-kilowatt project. Combined, the two solar gardens in New Richmond and River Falls are expected to produce approximately 250,000 kilowatt-hours per year, equivalent to the energy needed to power about 30 average homes.

Oelke says support for the pilot program from across the WPPI Energy membership is high. In total, approximately 20 member communities expressed interest in hosting a solar garden, and nine submitted pilot project applications. Entries were scored based on evidence of community support, marketing plan development, and the availability and readiness of an appropriate site of at least one half-acre in size.

Oelke adds that the projects will build upon the WPPI Energy membership's significant existing experience and commitment to renewable energy. Together through joint action, River Falls Municipal Utilities and the 50 other members of WPPI Energy have accomplished:

- Meeting six years early the current state Renewable Portfolio Standard, which requires 10% renewables by 2015.
- Building a power supply portfolio that consists of 13% renewable energy.
- Beginning in 2014, purchasing one megawatt of renewable energy generated by a new solar farm in the WPPI Energy member community of Jefferson, Wisconsin.

At the local level, River Falls:

- Ranks 3rd in the nation for green power sales as a percentage of total retail electricity sales.
- Ranks 8th in the nation for customer participation in renewable energy programs.
- In the past 10 years, River Falls has gone from zero kW of installed solar to over 90 kW.

River Fall's pilot project is expected to provide program design and technology insights that should enable WPPI Energy to eventually expand the solar garden initiative throughout its membership.

Anticipated next steps toward launching the community solar garden pilot project will include, in late 2014, selecting project vendors and developers, completing financing arrangements, and securing necessary project and site approvals. River Fall's customers should be able to subscribe to the projects beginning in early 2015, with construction anticipated to begin in the spring of 2015.

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*Community-owned, **River Falls Municipal Utilities** provides electric, water and wastewater services to approximately 6000 local homes and businesses.*

***WPPI Energy** is a regional power company serving River Falls Municipal Utilities and 50 other community-owned electric utilities in Wisconsin, Upper Michigan and Iowa. Together through WPPI Energy, these public power utilities share resources and own generation facilities to provide reliable, affordable electricity to more than 200,000 homes and businesses.*