Community Solar Project Continues to Move Forward

When it comes to renewable energy, few options are as hot right now as solar power. Solar (also called photovoltaic) systems help electric utilities reduce summer peak, and customers experience reduced bills. For individuals, one of the largest stumbling blocks to photovoltaic systems has been cost. Fortunately, prices are dropping. Yet not everyone with an interest in photovoltaic systems will want an individual system. That’s where community solar projects can help.

The City of Ames believes solar power will advance its sustainability goals, positively impact expensive summer energy costs, and provide a significant benefit to those wanting to be part of owning a solar system. And the City has just made it easier for anyone wanting to invest in solar. At the direction of the Ames City Council, Ames Electric Services will be installing a public solar array during the next year, which provides an option for Ames Electric Services customers to get involved.

“This exciting project will be a very visible reminder of how dedicated the citizens of Ames are to being green,” said Electric Services Director Donald Kom. “Individuals will be able to invest in the project making it a true community effort.”

Citizens will have the opportunity to invest directly in the project via the purchase of generation shares. Each share will represent a percentage of the total generation capacity of the array. The Community Solar Project will be kicking off in the spring with a goal of generating 1.5 megawatts (MW) of electricity by the end of 2017. Stay informed about this exciting project by looking for updates at www.cityofames.org/solar. For specific questions or comments, contact Steve Wilson, The Energy Guy, at 515.239.5177 or email him at swilson@city.ames.ia.us.

New Software to Improve Service

In an effort to better serve customers accessing the City’s Inspection and Planning Divisions, a new software permitting system will be launched in the spring. This improvement will make the permitting and inspecting process more efficient and customer friendly. The City of Ames regularly reviews its processes to determine if we are meeting the needs of our citizens, and we look to new technology to provide services even when City Hall is closed.

Watch for updates explaining new features of the system including how it will reduce paper files, provide more access options for customers, and streamline the process for faster service!
City Council Meetings
The following meetings will be held in the Council Chambers, 515 Clark Ave.:

6 p.m. March 7
6 p.m. March 28

A Council workshop is scheduled for 6 p.m. on March 21. For the most current information, go to: www.cityofames.org.

Block Party Reservations
Beginning on Monday, March 13, the Street ‘N’ Greet Block Party Trailer will be available to reserve. The trailer is a great tool to build connections in your neighborhood. Reservation requests for the Block Party Trailer can be submitted online by going to www.cityofames.org/trailer.

The trailer makes having a block party convenient and easy. Inside the trailer you’ll find tables, chairs, road barricades, games for children and adults, an audio system, and more. Once the form is completed, someone from the City will follow up with you about your reservation. Those with questions about the form or who prefer to register via telephone should contact the Department of Planning and Housing beginning on Monday, March 13, at 515.239.5400.

Let’s Be Careful Out There
When the weather warms, more people turn to biking and walking to get to where they are going. As various modes of transportation interact, safety is always a concern. The Ames Police Department has launched the Bike Walk Drive SMART campaign to increase safety through respect. The campaign focuses on the concept: How would you treat the other person if it was you?

To get respect you have to give respect. Simple actions like making eye contact, letting someone else go first, taking your time, and eliminating distractions can foster respect. Alternatively, not doing these things can breed disrespect and a “me first” attitude. When we’re in a hurry or distracted, our behavior can put others who share the transportation network at risk. Nobody wants to be hurt or to hurt others, so remember to Bike Walk Drive SMART!

Fire Hydrant Flushing Set for Spring
The Ames Public Works Department plans to begin flushing rust from city water mains beginning Wednesday, March 29, weather permitting, and continuing for approximately two weeks. The purpose of this annual program is to provide Ames residents with the safest and highest quality water possible. Flushing serves the following purposes:

• Dislodges and removes mineral deposits and sediments from the water mains.
• Verifies the proper operation of fire hydrants and valves.
• Helps identify weaknesses in the water system.
• Checks for closed valves and weak flows in the water system.

During the flushing process, Ames residents may experience rust in the water, even when crews are not working in the immediate area. To avoid rust, follow these tips:

• Turn on cold water first to check for rust to avoid drawing it into the hot water heater.
• If the water looks rusty, run the tap for one to two minutes until it clears.
• If rust discolors clothing in a washing machine, rust remover is available at the City Hall information desk, 515 Clark Ave., Ames fire stations, or by calling 515.239.5550.

Specific information about the times, dates, and locations of the crews will be released to the local media prior to beginning the flushing, or you may check the City’s website at www.cityofames.org.
Eco Fair Set for March 25
New hours from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The City of Ames is excited to once again host the annual Eco Fair at the Community Center Gym in City Hall, 515 Clark Ave. This year’s event will start one hour earlier than previous years.

From 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 25, Ames residents can learn more about reducing energy consumption including energy-saving products and services, water conservation, watershed protection, landscaping, and transportation efficiency. City departments and dozens of different vendors will provide information through booths and displays.

This is a great opportunity to get useful information on products and services from area vendors, see interesting displays, register for door prizes, play games, and enjoy free refreshments.

Energy Conservation: Good for the Earth

Saving energy is always a good idea. It keeps rates low over time, helps to maintain a reliable electrical system, can reduce our bills, and contributes to a cleaner environment. When we use less energy, we burn less fossil fuel. This reduces the amount of negative emissions from power plants, in particular carbon dioxide.

According to the Environmental Defense Fund, the United States releases about 40,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per person into the air every year. This can amount to 11,200,000,000 pounds per year. Here are a few ideas for reducing energy and carbon dioxide emissions:

- Don’t run your dishwasher until it is full, and use the energy-saving setting to dry the dishes. Carbon dioxide savings: 200 pounds per year.
- Turn your thermostat five degrees up in summer and down in winter. Savings: about 1,200 pounds per year.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around doors and windows to seal leaks. Savings: up to 1,000 pounds each year.
- Insulate your walls and ceilings. Savings: up to 2,000 pounds per year.
- Install the best energy-saving windows when it is time to replace your current ones. Savings: up to 10,000 pounds annually.

Energy Tips

Lower your utility bills and reduce your carbon footprint through simple conservation efforts.

- Clean furnace filters are necessary for efficient furnace operation. Remember to check and change filters regularly.
- Adding insulation to your home can cut your heating costs up to 25%.
- Turn your thermostat down by 5 degrees and save up to 15% of your heating energy.
- Seal ducts so more conditioned air gets where you want it to go.
- Keep your registers free of obstructions to allow your conditioned air to do its job.
- Open your blinds and drapes to allow in the heating rays of the sun.
- Have your furnace checked periodically by a professional service person.
- Participate in Smart Energy programs to save energy. For more information, visit www.cityofames.org/smartenergy.
Prime Time Power
Even though it’s winter, customers can still plan ahead for warm weather. Prime Time Power is available to homeowners and small businesses with central air conditioners.

An important note: You do not need to reapply for Prime Time Power if you signed up in a previous year. The $5 credit during each of the four summer months is automatically applied to your account.

For more information, call Utility Customer Service at 515.239.5120 or Steve Wilson at 515.239.5177.

Renewable Energy
For December 2016
14.3% of electricity used this month was generated from wind.
2.5% of electricity this month was generated by refuse derived fuel (RDF) from the Resource Recovery Plant.
61 Ames customers have invested in solar voltaic systems.
57 LED street lights installed for a total of 738.

Degree Day information available at www.CityOfAmes.org/Electric

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Ask the Energy Guy
Q: How can I find out what it costs to operate my electric devices?
A: There are a few things you can do that may help you understand what your electric devices are costing you. If all you need is a ballpark estimate you can get one from the City of Ames Energy Guy webpage. There you will find a link to “appliances.” Here you can find most common pieces of electrical equipment and an average cost of operation. Another way to understand appliance cost is to estimate the cost by formula. In Ames, our residential electric rate is based on the kilowatt-hour (kWh), or the number of kilowatts (KW) used in one hour. To calculate the cost of an electric appliance you must first determine the number of watts (W) it uses.

Many appliances have a name plate on the back that will tell you the wattage. If you are given amps you can calculate watts by taking amps times volts. Regular household voltage in Ames is 120. So, 2 amps = 240 watts. Dividing the wattage by 1,000 will give you the kilowatts. Kilowatts times the cost per kilowatt-hour will give you the cost to operate the appliance for one hour. In Ames, the cost for a kilowatt-hour of electricity is 11.66 cents in summer (June, July, August, September) and 9.66 cents in the winter.

How much would it cost to run an electric space heater? From the name plate we determine our heater uses 1,500 watts.

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\begin{align*}
1,500 \text{ watts/1000} & = 1.5 \text{ KW} \\
1.5 \text{ KW} \times \$0.0966 \text{ (winter rate)} & = \$0.145 \text{ per kWh}
\end{align*}
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In this example, if the space heater ran four hours it would cost about 58 cents to operate.

If you need to have a specific cost you can use an appliance meter, and I have a number of meters that will measure the electricity and tell you what it costs to operate. The meters are free for check out. If you would like more information on how to figure the cost to run electric devices call Steve Wilson, the Energy Guy, at 515.239.5177 or email me at swilson@city.ames.ia.us.