

THE CHARGING STATION

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF A²ZERO AND
THE ANN ARBOR OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATIONS



IN THIS ISSUE:

WELCOME 1
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 1
NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE 2
DECARBONIZATION ACTION 3
ERESILIENCE HUB 4
COLLABORATOR SPOTLIGHT 5
DISTRICT GEOTHERMAL 6
EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS 7

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



The lead author for this month's feature articles is Jordan Larson, Community Engagement Innovator. Jordan's work builds community capacity, engagement, and action around A²ZERO initiatives and goals.



WELCOME

Welcome from the City of Ann Arbor's Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI)! This month's issue of The Charging Station focuses on our work and partnership with Community Action Network and the residents of the Bryant Neighborhood to equitably decarbonize Ann Arbor's Bryant neighborhood. If you are interested in learning more about decarbonization, and how it is guided by the A²ZERO plan, more detail can be found on our website: www.a2gov.org/sustainability. And as always, thank you for your interest in sustainability activities in Ann Arbor!

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Equity and justice are at the center of A²ZERO and staff in OSI are continuing to ground our work in these critical principles. In that light, we'd like to take a moment to honor the geographic and historic space we share. We acknowledge that the land the City of Ann Arbor occupies is the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabe and Wyandot peoples. We further acknowledge that our city stands, like almost all property in the United States, on lands obtained, generally in unconscionable ways, from indigenous peoples. The taking of this land was formalized by the Treaty of Detroit in 1807. Knowing where we live, work, study, and recreate does not change the past, but a thorough understanding of the ongoing consequences of this past can empower us in our work to create a future that supports human flourishing and justice for all individuals.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

BRYANT AT THE FRONTLINES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Bryant is located on the south side of Ann Arbor, just south of I-94 on the east side of Stone School Road. The neighborhood, as defined for the project described below, is comprised of Bryant Elementary school, Arbor Oaks Park, the Bryant Community Center, and 262 single-family homes built between 1969 and 1971.



An aerial rendering of the Bryant neighborhood.

Bryant is one of Ann Arbor’s last vestiges of what is known as “naturally occurring affordable housing,” although there is nothing natural about it. Over the years, this neighborhood has grappled with under-investment from local, regional, and state agencies, nonprofits, and others. As a result, many Bryant residents contend with extremely high energy bills due to under-insulated homes, a lack of tree canopy coverage, poor indoor and outdoor air quality thanks to the neighborhood’s proximity to the City’s capped landfill and the highway ring, and chronic flooding due to poor drainage issues.

Despite these challenges, this neighborhood is home to some of the City’s most diverse and engaged residents. This is why, for the last three years, OSI has been working with the residents of Bryant, Community Action Network, Elevate, and other community partners to collaboratively figure out what it would take to **make Bryant the first fully decarbonized existing neighborhood in the country!** This isn’t just a lofty vision; it’s a practical initiative that draws on the expertise of the Bryant community members to transform a repeatedly overlooked neighborhood into the blueprint for the nation’s effort to address the climate crisis, while continuing to honor the neighborhood’s sense of quality and community.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD:

- Roughly 50% of the homes are owner-occupied, while the other 50% are rented
- The 2021 median household income in Bryant was just above \$45,000, compared to \$72,000 citywide
- Homes in the neighborhood were predominantly built by the same firm, leading to two dominant floorplan designs
- The original construction of Bryant’s homes did not include insulation or weatherization that would be considered adequate today
- The neighborhood has historically suffered from flooding
- The Bryant Community Center, operated by Community Action Network, provides support services to households in the neighborhood

DECARBONIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY ACTION IN BRYANT

CENTERING COMMUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP

BACKGROUND

We began our decarbonization and sustainability work in Bryant in 2021 when we launched the project with our incredible partner [Community Action Network \(CAN\)](#). CAN is an organization that serves under-resourced residents of Washtenaw County through a network of local community centers. In Bryant, CAN's largest partner community, they operate the [Bryant Community Center](#).

By partnering with and working through an organization already embedded in the community, OSI approaches our work in Bryant as a process of co-design and co-creation that builds trust and centers the knowledge, goals, dreams, and aspirations of residents. In Bryant we are exploring the questions of what equitable decarbonization looks like in practice, and what residents want and need from action on sustainability and climate change in the neighborhood. To answer these questions, OSI and CAN have been building community capacity and conducting extensive engagement and outreach to ensure resident voices are heard and integrated throughout the project. In these first two years of the project, CAN has hired residents from the neighborhood as outreach specialists (Krystal Steward and Nimsi Paavo), and OSI has hired a Community Engagement Innovator (Jordan Larson, previously Galen Hardy) to support engagement work in Bryant and beyond. Improvements in comfort, health, safety and affordability have been framed and prioritized in our work thanks to engagement with residents starting in the earliest stages of the project.

ASSESSMENTS, REPAIRS AND RETROFITS

To date, CAN, with support from OSI, has secured more than \$2.2 million in funding to assist residents with home repair, weatherization, electrification, and solarization. The first step in the process was to work with residents to create a home energy assessment tailored to the specific needs and opportunities in Bryant. Today, this assessment is being used to identify repair and energy retrofit needs to decarbonize and improve efficiency, comfort, and health of individual households. These assessments are provided to residents free of charge, and so far more than 70 homes have been assessed in the neighborhood.

With grant funds successfully secured by CAN and the City, 50 income-qualified homes will be provided repair and energy retrofit services, taking a significant step in supporting and decarbonizing households who need services the most. Contractors are currently on the ground



Photo: OSI staff in front of the Bryant Community Center sign.

in Bryant upgrading 20 homes, 10 of which are almost complete. Additionally, two homes have even been solarized! While we are excited about and celebrate our progress, this work is just getting started. We are signing more homes up for energy assessments, seeking additional funds to provide upgrades to more households, and leveraging the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) to bring energy efficiency improvements to more homes in the neighborhood. If you live in Bryant and are interested in signing up for your free assessment, please fill out [this quick form!](#)

COMMUNITY CENTER TURNED RESILIENCE HUB TRANSITIONING INTO A STRONGER COMMUNITY



Photo: Ann Arbor Mayor Christopher Taylor, City Council Members, OSI staff, CAN staff, and Bryant Residents at the ribbon cutting for Bryant's opening as a resilience hub.

In addition to the work we're doing to bring decarbonization upgrades into homes, we are also leading by example by decarbonizing the Bryant Community Center building itself. In June of this year, the Bryant Community Center officially had its ribbon cutting as Ann Arbor's second brick and mortar resilience hub. This means that with these systems in place, the Center will be able to continue providing its essential community services even when there's a grid power outage, while also serving as an emergency response hub during extended and dangerous outages. The Center serves as a real-world example of decarbonizing a home or business, allowing residents and A²ZERO Collaborators to see technologies, techniques, and best practices for building decarbonization in action.

To make this possible, a solar array, battery storage system and onsite stormwater management features were installed along with fruit trees planted. The City has also proposed using its Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding to transition the Community Center into a living, learning laboratory of what building decarbonization looks like in practice. This includes fully electrifying the building, installing smart meters and a smart electrical panel, better insulation, programmable thermostats, replacing windows, upgrading the HVAC system to cold-climate air source heat pumps, low flow faucets and toilets, a heat pump washer/dryer unit, and making onsite accessibility improvements to ensure that everyone is able to use the Center.



Photo: Krystal Steward and Nimsi Paavo table at a community event.

DISTRICT GEOTHERMAL

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT (AND WARM)

Earlier this year, OSI and CAN were thrilled to receive a [grant from the U.S. Department of Energy \(DOE\)](#) to plan and design a district-scale geothermal system that could provide up to 75% of the heating and cooling load for the whole Bryant neighborhood. This award presents an unparalleled opportunity to advance many of the identified needs and desires of Bryant residents, including: decarbonization, affordable energy, clean and healthy energy powering homes, and demonstration of on-the-ground leadership. This project will also demonstrate the feasibility of switching from fossil gas for heating to geothermal ([learn more about geothermal here](#)).

If feasible, this transition could: increase energy efficiency, reduce energy and HVAC replacement costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve indoor comfort, and significantly improve indoor air quality. Installing a neighborhood-scale system is also cheaper than individually installing geothermal at every building. This high upfront cost is the biggest barrier to individual households switching from traditional heating and cooling, so addressing it is essential. A district approach to geothermal also provides more flexibility in where geothermal wells are placed and drilled, reducing the physical disruption required at the household level to connect to the system. Rather than drilling wells in each home's backyard, wells can be in more open and out-of-the-way areas, such as parks and school grounds.

Led by Community Action Network with support from the City of Ann Arbor, over the next year the project team will be doing monthly events, surveys, workshops, and more to ensure community voice is at the center of the project. Resident input and leadership will guide the creation of evaluation metrics for the project, help design the system in ways that represent the community's preferences and needs and help us understand the value and interest residents place on a geothermal system. Residents can also engage in the project by learning about and participating in career/job training opportunities, as workforce development for a just transition is another key component of the project. To coordinate all this engagement, leadership. If you are a Bryant resident and interested in applying for this position, please email Krystal Steward: ksteward@canwashtenaw.org.

By the end of October 2024, we will have a complete system design, informed by resident input. As part of this grant from the DOE, our design plan will then be reviewed and possibly selected to receive an implementation grant. We plan on doing everything we can over the next year to position our project as the best candidate for this award and make a district geothermal system a reality for Bryant.



Graphic depicting a geothermal loop. Courtesy HEET.

Contact Information

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Interested in having announcements posted in
The Charging Station? Contact Sheronda at
SGloster@a2gov.org

COLLABORATOR SPOTLIGHT

COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

This month, we are proud to feature A²ZERO Collaborator [Community Action Network](#)!



The sustainability and decarbonization work CAN does in partnership with OSI is just one of many ways the organization serves residents of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County. More broadly, CAN partners with children, youth, and families from under-resourced Washtenaw County neighborhoods to create better futures for themselves and improve the communities in which they live. The following three goals serve as the pillars of CAN's programming.

PROGRAMMING GOALS

EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUTH. Prepare youth to fulfill their academic potential and become successful, self-sufficient adults. CAN offers educational resources, an after-school program, art and design, summer camps, and career skills development, which can be read about [here](#).

STABILIZING FAMILIES. Assist families in meeting their basic needs and create better futures for themselves. CAN provides stabilization resources, including food assistance, support and advocacy, and sustainability, which is described in detail [here](#).

BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES. Create and maintain clean, safe, and supportive neighborhoods where families can thrive. CAN hosts events and other location-specific opportunities which can be found [here](#).

APPROACH

Rooting their work **within community**, CAN models a place-based approach by offering their programs and resources through community centers that serve defined neighborhoods. In CAN's words,

"Each community has its own culture and the residents have their own set of needs. By being physically located within these neighborhoods and school buildings, we are able to be accessible and responsive to our neighbors to ensure families receive support specific to their unique circumstances."

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

- 773,231 pounds of food were distributed through CAN's food pantries!
- 97% of CAN students graduate high school
- 88% of CAN elementary students had an A/B grade average or improved a full letter grade by the end of the year
- 3,650 hours of volunteer time donated

Learn more about CAN's impact, partnerships, and growth over the last year at their [22-23 Annual Report](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Compost Facility Audit

Thursday, November 9th | Noon – 4 PM | 4170 Platt Rd

Join the City of Ann Arbor for an exciting in-person event: your chance to get your hands dirty and help us find out what's in the compost. This event is perfect for anyone interested in reducing waste and promoting a greener environment. Water, tools, PPE will be available. Learn more and sign up [here](#).

Love a Park Day at Bandemer Park

Tuesday, November 21st | 8:30 – 10AM | Bandemer

Join GIVE 365's Adopt-a-Park program and the City of Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations for a monthly [workday at Bandemer Park](#)! Park stewardship tasks will include litter pick-up, invasive brush removal, and more! All tools and supplies will be provided.

Environmental Commission Meeting

Thursday, November 30th | 7 - 9 PM | Virtual

This meeting will be broadcast live on CTN Cable Channel 16, ATT Channel 99, and online at [this link](#). To speak at public comment call 312-626-6799 or Toll Free 877-853-5247. Enter Meeting ID: 922 9696 1644.

For more information on our upcoming events, please visit www.a2gov.org/sustainability/events.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Launch of Ann Arbor Water

Last year, the City of Ann Arbor introduced a new brand for our water services: Ann Arbor Water. The new, focused effort and look has helped communicate all future water-related matters more effectively to our community.

Watch [this video](#) to learn more or email at water@a2gov.org to schedule a presentation to your neighborhood association or community group.

Ann Arbor wins National EPA award

OSI was successful in winning a U.S. EPA Environmental Justice Government to Government grant to expand work on local and regional resilience. This grant will enable the City, along with Ypsilanti, Washtenaw County, the Ann Arbor Housing Commission and other community partners to develop a regional resilience network that allows for the continual investment in the adaptive capacity and enhancement of local social cohesion, create four brick and mortar resilience hubs, and create a resilience grant program that fosters the connection between the various hubs. More details about this work will be forthcoming, and for now interested stakeholders can learn about all the national awardees at [this link](#).

A²ZERO Ambassadors Application Now Open!

The A²ZERO Ambassador Program provides an opportunity for interested individuals to dive deeply into pathways for advancing local sustainability initiatives, resilience, and carbon neutrality. To join our 6th Ambassador cohort, please [visit this link](#). Applications open until February 14th at 5 PM.

OSI is Hiring!

OSI is currently looking for individuals with a passion for climate action that might be interested in joining our team. To see a current list of opportunities, please check out the City's [hiring website](#).

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