

THE CHARGING STATION

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



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ABOUT THE EDITOR



From the team (pictured here with the visiting delegation from Tuebingen, Germany in September)! Have a safe, comfortable, and warm holiday season and we'll see you in 2025.



Bandemer Park in the winter.

WELCOME

Welcome from the City of Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI). In this issue of the Charging Station, OSI is delighted to share details about how to celebrate the holidays with your most sustainable foot forward. If you are interested in learning more about any of the organizations featured in this issue and how you can get involved, more detail can be found on our website: www.a2gov.org/sustainability. 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.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK ON 2024

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED SINCE OUR YEAR FOUR UPDATE IN JUNE

As we gear up to say goodbye to 2024 and welcome 2025, the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations wants to take a moment to reflect on some of the highlights of our shared work to advance A²ZERO this past year. Below are some of the activities the Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI), and many of you, have been working hard to advance. This is not a complete list of activities underway but an illustrative example of some of the things we are working on to help us achieve our goal of a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030. If you're got ideas for actions we should be considering in 2025, send us a note at sustainability@a2gov.org.

STRATEGY 1. 100% Renewable Energy

- On November 5, 2024, Ann Arborites overwhelming voted (79%) to authorize the creation of a new Sustainable Energy Utility. This SEU will be stood up over the next 18-24 months and will provide renewable energy services, along with energy efficiency and electrification support, to anyone interested within the City of Ann Arbor. This novel and creative concept will help the City advance our clean energy, affordability, reliability, resilience, and sustainability goals. To learn more about the SEU or to join the waitlist and see how the SEU can help you, see www.a2gov.org/a2seu.
- OSI, along with Community Action Network, the residents of Bryant, IMEG, and numerous other collaborators submitted a grant to the U.S. Department of Energy to install the City's first networked geothermal system.
- For the first time in the City's history, OSI intervened in the two gas cases before the Michigan Public Service Commission, calling for a "Future of Gas" proceeding that outlines a path to decarbonized heating and cooling solutions throughout DTE's service territory.
- Through the Solarize Ann Arbor program, OSI helped residents install over 5.2 MW of solar on over 700 homes. A new group buy for early 2025 is forming now. Find out more and join at: www.a2gov.org/solar!
- In late fall the City welcomed two new ground mounted solar arrays at the Ann Arbor municipal airport. This brings the total amount of solar on City facilities to over 700 kW and growing --- with many more projects in design!
- In November we broke ground on a geothermal system for the Bryant Community Center. The hope is that this system will be one of the anchors for a future neighborhood geothermal system!



Solar panels installed through the Solarize Ann Arbor program this past year.



The Bryant Community Center, where geothermal drilling began recently.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK ON 2024

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED SINCE OUR YEAR FOUR UPDATE IN JUNE

STRATEGY 2. Switch our appliances to electric

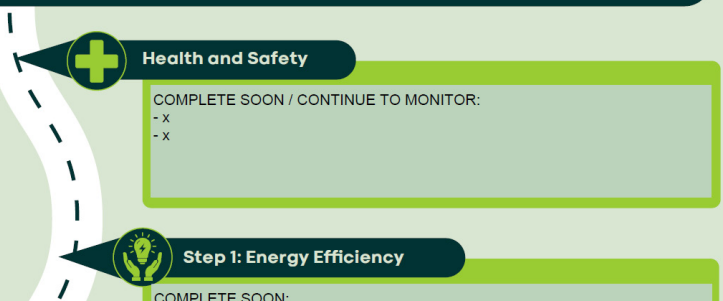
- [The A²ZERO Home Energy Rebate program](#) has distributed over \$200,000 to Ann Arbor residents for home weatherization, heat pumps and heat pump water heaters, electrical panel upgrades, energy storage and e-bikes as of October 2024, with much more in the works. Sign up for your rebate at the website above.
- The 3rd Annual Electrification EXPO was a success with hundreds of attendees and dozens of vendors, helping residents learn about electrification, energy efficiency and on-site solar.
- Work began with Stantec to assess the feasibility of district geothermal in Ann Arbor. The team is currently mapping and analyzing which parts of Ann Arbor are well suited for district geothermal and where it could have the biggest impact. Information gleaned from this analysis will help inform the City's future energy initiatives.
- [The Commercial EV Charger Program](#) launched with the goal of increasing the availability of publicly accessible EV chargers in the community. The call for applications is now closed for this first round but, if successful, the Office anticipates running multiple more rounds of funding support.
- OSI hosted a Sustainable Lawn Care Learning Session and developed a case study guide to showcase the stories of several companies who have had success with electric lawn care to support [the community transition to electric lawn care equipment](#).
- OSI received a \$2.9 million grant to support the expansion of electric vehicle charging throughout the community. Funding from the grant program will help support a city-wide electric vehicle charging deployment plan as well as the installation of significantly more charging infrastructure community wide. The program is expected to begin in mid 2025.
- [City fleet electrification](#) continued in earnest, with the City nearing 50% electrification of light duty vehicles and the continued integration of heavy-duty electric vehicles, such as refuse trucks and street sweepers, into the fleet. And with the recent winning of \$667,000 to help support two more electric refuse trucks, this work maintains its momentum into 2025.

STRATEGY 3. Energy Efficiency

- [The A²ZERO Home Energy Advisor](#) has delivered "Path to Zero" customized home decarbonization plans to over 200 Ann Arbor households, in addition to assisting dozens with contractor connections, bid reviews, rebate and financing information and project assistance. If you haven't yet, [sign up for your free A²ZERO Home Energy Assessment](#).
- [The Green Rental Housing program](#) received a resolution of support from the Ann Arbor Energy Commission and OSI is preparing to bring the program to City Council for consideration in early 2025.
- OSI and Community Action Network received \$3.1 million from the Michigan Public Service Commission to continue work to decarbonize as many homes as possible in the Bryant neighborhood as part of the effort to make the neighborhood the first existing carbon neutral neighborhood in America.
- OSI helped secure a grant to transition all streetlights to LEDs.
- [The Home Energy Rating Disclosure \(HERD\) team](#) continued to work with Real Estate professionals to maximize compliance and improve processes to help ensure that everyone has fact-based information regarding their home's energy performance. In 2025, the team will be working on some additional support services for new home buyers.
- [The Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge](#) just brought on Fresh Coast Climate Solutions to help business owners efficiently develop their own customized sustainability strategies so they can devote their time and energy to running their business.

YOUR PATH STARTS HERE

Below is a summary of recommended steps for you. Following this sequence will help you realize your health, comfort, and savings goals one step at a time. Taking these steps in order is generally recommended, but going outside of order does not prevent you from achieving improvements and enjoying benefits within your home.



A blank example of the HEA Path to Zero Report.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK ON 2024

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• **STRATEGY 4. Reduce VMT by 50%**

- OSI continued to fund and build the installation of bike facilities and bike intersection improvements across the City.
- Efforts continued to update the City's [comprehensive land use plan](#), which includes the three core values of affordability, equity, and sustainability.
- OSI supported the creation of a e-bike loan program where residents [can check-out an A²ZERO branded e-bike while doing errands around town](#).
- OSI continued efforts to adopt the 2021 building code in Michigan through outreach, education, and engagement with elected officials.

STRATEGY 5. Circular Economy

- Undertook a deep exploration into the feasibility of creating a citywide returnable container program. Through this work, submitted a grant application to launch a city-wide program.
- [The Ann Arbor Sustainable Food Business Coalition](#) kicked off the first full year of collaboration with the Ann Arbor food business community which is now comprised of more than 40 member businesses representing the restaurant, bar, cafe, food artisan, retail, and non-profit sectors. In 2025, the SFBC is looking forward to cultivating additional opportunities for coordinated sustainability action.
- Through the first year of our contract with VegMichigan, we have reached over 3,715 Ann Arbor residents with educational programming designed to increase our community's awareness of the carbon impacts of food and promote the benefits of more plant-forward diets!
- OSI teamed up with ZeroWaste.org to host [the week-long Food Waste Challenge](#), which educates participants about the impacts of wasted food and provides practical food waste reduction strategies, including changes to shopping, storage, cooking, and food disposal practices. In total, 533 residents participated in the challenge.
- OSI and community partners hosted [the 3rd Annual Ann Arbor Local Food Festival](#), which was a success, with hundreds of residents and over 40 food business and non-profit collaborators attending.
- OSI staff continue efforts to research, draft, and develop a Sustainable Food Purchasing Program, which will provide a detailed framework and strategic support for sustainable food purchasing by the City of Ann Arbor.
- In late 2024 OSI launched planning efforts for [a community cookbook](#), which will feature recipes, tips, and stories contributed by Ann Arbor residents to provide a practical, actionable resource for sustainable eating in the Ann Arbor Area. More details on how to contribute recipes can be found below.
- Our first electronics takeback event collected more than 6400 lbs. of electronic devices to be reused, repaired, refurbished, and recycled. In 2025 we plan to host multiple more take back events!
- The City of Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations won a small grant from the U.S. EPA to initiate a refrigerant management and recycling program. More details about this program will be available in 2025.



Main Street Ann Arbor with the winter lighting on display.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK ON 2024

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STRATEGY 6. Resilience

- [The 10,000th tree](#) was distributed this fall through the 10,000 Trees Initiative. A survival study was launched to determine the status of the trees distributed so far. Thanks to a [\\$1 million grant from the US Forest Service and American Forests](#), we will be working to advance tree equity through plantings and maintenance work on private property in EPA disadvantaged communities.
- More than 440 households are participating in [the Pollinator Aware Yard Care program](#), helping us keep pollinators safe and healthy in our community.
- OSI supported the installation of two air quality monitors and is actively working to install eight more; a public dashboard displaying the data is available at a2gov.org/airdata.
- [The A²ZERO Ambassador program](#) graduated its 100th+ Ambassador this summer, achieving the program goal of training 100 neighborhood Ambassadors by 2025. Applications for the 7th Cohort of A2ZERO Ambassadors will open in December 2024, with training beginning in March 2025.
- Ann Arbor's 4th and 5th Resilience Hubs have been identified as Peace Neighbor Center and Green Baxter Court Community Center and work is underway to transition these community sites through efficiency improvements, adoption of renewable energies, and community partnership.
- OSI staff is partnering with the City of Ann Arbor's Office of Emergency Management to prepare for a robust preparedness engagement strategy in 2025 to help distribute household preparedness and emergency kits.



A tree planted at the Ann Arbor Bicentennial Tree Planting in September.

STRATEGY 7. Other

- In 2024 we launched our [A²ZERO Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages and since then, we've seen engagement on the rise. If you haven't yet, follow us at [@A2Zero2030](#) on Instagram and A2Zero on Facebook!
- [The newsletter](#) has continued to grow, with 377 new subscribers since June!
- Since June, [five more episodes of Green Light](#) have been released, with viewership growing – and [the most recent episode on the UM Community Read](#).
- In collaboration with the Leslie Science and Nature Center and Neutral Zone, OSI helped create Youth Now Climate Action, a small group of high school students representing various Ann Arbor Public Schools focused on highlighting environmental problems and coming up with solutions.
- 8 AmeriCorps members completed their service term as the inaugural cohort of OSI's AmeriCorps program. Members added significant capacity to OSI's events and outreach.
- In 2024, OSI sponsored and hosted its first ever sustainability focused film series in partnership with Michigan Theater! More than 250 residents attended the screenings, and 8 experts shared their thoughts and reflections in post-film speaker panels.
- Coming up in 2025, OSI will be hosting its monthly [Sustainability Forums](#) speaker series at the downtown Ann Arbor District Library, featuring OSI staff and other local experts.



The most recent episode of Green Light on the University of Michigan Community Read.

GREEN HOLIDAY GIFT-GIVING

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR!

This time of year is all about staying cozy and letting your loved ones know you care, so we put together this list of sustainable gift-giving and celebration suggestions to help you maximize time with those you love while helping advance sustainable-practices. Stay warm, stay safe, and stay happy this season! We're looking forward to seeing you in 2025.

STAYING COZY FOR THE WINTER: HEA and Rebates

Stay cozy this winter by improving the comfort and cost savings of your home with the Home Energy Advisor and Home Energy Rebates. With the launch of these two programs in 2024, there's never been a better time to do energy efficiency work and upgrades to your home. The Home Energy Advisor is a free concierge service offered by the City of Ann Arbor to help you create a customized home energy report and personalized support on your home decarbonization journey. The A²ZERO Home Energy Rebate program can also support this work – available to any Ann Arbor resident. Residents who will be or have done eligible home energy efficiency work in the past 60 days are encouraged to apply for these rebates! Learn more about how you can make your home cozier this winter at osi.a2gov.org/rebates and a2zerohea.org.



THRIFTING: Check out community spaces such as Kiwanis

One Ann Arbor resident's thrift store drop-off is another Ann Arbor resident's treasure! Ann Arbor is home to many thrift and charity shops, saving unwanted items from the landfill and giving them new homes. With a city so full of these thrift stores, they provide a great opportunity to find something unique for someone you love at an affordable price. Check out the list of A²ZERO Collaborators to find reuse stores like Kiwanis at osi.a2gov.org/collaborators.

REDUCE WASTE: Gift an experience instead of an item!

Ann Arbor is full of fun things to do, especially at this time of year! Instead of gifting an item, gift your loved ones an experience: a trip to the Leslie Science and Nature Center, an afternoon at the Ann Arbor Hands On Museum, see a movie at the Michigan or State Theaters, visit the Humane Society of Huron Valley's Tiny Lions Cat Cafe, or, if none of these strike your fancy, visit Destination Ann Arbor's website to get even more ideas!

LEARN A SKILL TOGETHER: Repair Collaborators

Give a friend a fish and they'll have dinner for a night, teach a friend to fish and they'll have dinner for a lifetime! While we don't have any fishing instructors as A²ZERO Collaborators (yet!), we do have lots of Collaborators teaching valuable skills, such as how to repair bikes, household items, clothes, and more. Learn a new skill with a friend and then take those skills out into the world this winter!

GREEN HOLIDAY GIFT-GIVING

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR!

FOOD: Local restaurants & markets are great sources of sustainable, yummy food

Speaking of experiences, we can't think of a better experience than visiting a local restaurant, market, or farm stop to eat or gather ingredients for a local, sustainable meal. Ann Arbor is full of good food, to be enjoyed both at a restaurant and at home at the dinner table. Check out our list of Collaborators to find local, sustainable restaurants and markets at osi.a2gov.org/collaborators.

PLUS! If you're interested in sharing your climate-friendly food habits to help your community eat more sustainably, we encourage you to consider contributing to the A²ZERO Community Cookbook by submitting a recipe, sharing a climate-friendly food tip, or nominating a community food leader to have their story featured in the cookbook. Learn more and submit your recipes at osi.a2gov.org/cookbook.

RESILIENCE: Host a neighborhood potluck, get to know your neighbors, & build community

Celebrate your community and your neighbors with a neighborhood potluck. Neighborhood resilience in times of extreme weather or disruption is at its strongest when neighbors are familiar with each other, and there's no better time to get to know your neighbors than during the festive season! Bake your favorite food, make a warm drink, and get to know all the beautiful people that make Ann Arbor the lovely place it is.



RESILIENCE: Host a neighborhood swap

Once you've received all your new-to-you gifts, learned some new skills, had new experiences, and gotten to know your neighbors, host a neighborhood swap! Like a yard sale, neighborhood swaps are opportunities for neighbors to get rid of items they no longer want – together. For free! Get rid of what you don't want by giving your neighbors what they do want. Check out our guide for hosting a neighborhood swap!

If you want to stay up-to-date on the latest sustainability events, actions, and tips, follow A2ZERO online on [Instagram at @a2zero2030](#) and on [Facebook at A2Zero!](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Save Money & Save the Planet - Home Energy Efficiency & Electrification | Sunday, January 12, 3 – 4:30PM | Westgate Branch, Ann Arbor District Library

Learn about how home energy efficiency & electrification will reduce your energy costs and your carbon footprint. Learn about the multitudes of incentives – federal, state, local & utility – that will lower the cost of your investments. Plus, you'll receive an update on what to expect to happen to federal incentives under the new presidential administration. [RSVP here.](#)

Meet with OSI staff and Ann Arbor ClimateCorps at the below dates to learn about **the A²ZERO Ambassador Program** and how to get involved in local climate action. Community members are welcome to interview in-person for the next cohort beginning March 2025. Applications are also accepted online. Learn more at osi.a2gov.org/ambassadors. December 17, 5 – 7PM (Downtown AADL Branch), December 18, 10 – 11:30AM (Traverwood Library AADL Branch), December 18, 12 – 2PM (Malletts Creek AADL Branch), and December 19, 5 – 7 PM (Westgate AADL Branch).

Sustainability Forum: Natural Features and Me | Thursday, January 30, 6:00 – 7:30PM | Downtown Branch, AADL
OSI is bringing the Sustainability Series back in 2025 for another season at the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library! Attend these public events to learn more and ask questions about exciting new programs, initiatives, and updates from our office and our amazing community collaborators.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

New episode of Green Light: Alan Piñon, Director of Communications & Marketing, and Jenna Steele, Sustainability Program Assistant, both from the University of Michigan, join to discuss the University's Community Read of *Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story From Despair to Possibility*.

Energy Rebates Available: We've still got [A²ZERO Home Energy Rebates](#) available, so if you're considering home improvement work, we encourage you to work with [the Home Energy Advisor program](#) to decarbonize your home and take advantage of opportunities like the Rebates.

UM Community Read: OSI is delighted to be collaborating with the University of Michigan to promote their community read of *Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility* which is available to anyone connected to internet in the State of Michigan until December 13 for free!

Calling all Food Lovers and Home Cooks: Contribute to the A²ZERO Community Cookbook! OSI is compiling a community cookbook! Do you enjoy cooking from scratch with local, seasonal ingredients, have creative ways of using up food scraps, or have a tasty plant-based recipe you love? Contribute recipes and sustainable food tips to the A²ZERO Community Cookbook at osi.a2gov.org/cookbook.

Ambassador applications now open! Join [the 7th Cohort of A²ZERO Ambassadors](#) to gain increased knowledge, tools, and resources to discuss sustainability broadly and specific actions you and your community can implement to advance carbon neutrality.

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

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