

THE CHARGING STATION

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



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ABOUT THE EDITOR



Dr. Missy Stults (she/her) is the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Innovations. She works with all city operations, residents, businesses, the University of Michigan, nonprofits, and others to make Ann Arbor one of the most sustainable and equitable cities in America.



A solar array on a home in Ann Arbor, installed through the Ann Arbor Solarize program.

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 the Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU). If you are interested in learning more about the SEU, you can do so at a2gov.org/a2SEU. For information 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.

GET TO KNOW THE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY UTILITY

UNDERSTANDING THE BALLOT LANGUAGE

On November 5, 2024, Ann Arbor voters will be presented with the following question:

The City of Ann Arbor proposes to create within its boundaries an opt-in, publicly owned Sustainable Energy Utility (“SEU”) to (i) supply, generate, transmit, distribute, and store electricity, heat, cooling, light, and power (solely from renewable sources); and (ii) provide energy-related services. The SEU could, for example, provide individual or networked rooftop solar panels, heat pumps, geothermal systems, or batteries to customers to supplement existing utility services. The SEU will be fee-based. This proposal does not authorize new taxes.

Shall the Charter be amended to authorize the City to establish, construct, own, and operate an opt-in Sustainable Energy Utility?

If this vote passes, the City will immediately begin the work to create and formally launch the SEU. If the vote does not pass, the City will continue its other programs to advance our clean energy, climate, and equity goals (to learn more about these initiatives, please see: www.a2gov.org/sustainability).

Some key definitions from the ballot language:

Opt-in: Only those who choose to participate in the SEU will be a part of it. If you’d like to express your interest now and get on [the waitlist, you can do so here.](#)

Solely from renewable sources: The SEU would only be authorized to deploy renewable energy systems, in addition to other energy services such as energy efficiency and electrification. The SEU would not be authorized to deploy fossil-fuel based systems. Put another way, the SEU was conceived to help expand access to healthy, safe, affordable, and clean energy.

Supplement: The SEU will not be replacing DTE, but rather be supplemental to the existing utility. SEU customers would still have some electrical service or at least an electrical connection to DTE.

Fee-based: This means that you will pay a rate based on your energy usage and participation in the SEU only if you opt in to the SEU. If you don’t opt in to the SEU, you will pay nothing toward it – as stated above, this proposal does not authorize new taxes.

GET TO KNOW THE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY UTILITY

WHAT IS IT?

What is a Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU)?

- The Ann Arbor Sustainable Energy Utility is an opt-in, supplemental municipally-owned energy utility that provides 100% renewable energy from local solar generation and battery storage systems and networked geothermal systems installed at participating homes and businesses in the City.
- In addition, the SEU could invest in energy efficiency and electrification in local homes and businesses.
- The SEU will focus on reliability and resilience.
- The SEU is a municipal utility operated like how the water utility operates.

What services could an SEU provide?

- Solar generation and energy storage to improve reliability.
- Sustainable heating solutions such as air source and ground source heat pumps, including networked geothermal.
- Robust energy waste reduction efforts that improve indoor comfort, health, and safety.
- On-bill financing to help lower costs and increase payment flexibility.
- Microgrids between neighboring households, to share solar and storage.
- Support for electrification of fossil gas appliances to support cleaner and safer homes and businesses.
- Over time, community solar programs and new community desired offerings.

Why an SEU?

An SEU focuses on locally generated, clean, municipally-owned power. It would:

- Invest immediately in clean energy in our community.
- Help more Ann Arbor residents access the benefits of clean energy and receive energy waste reduction services.
- Focus on increasing the reliability and resilience of our energy system.
- Advance our community's commitment to climate and equity.
- Deploy renewable energy quickly using a system that is built out from the ground up and in response to subscriber demand, thus immediately reducing carbon emissions.

This house is powered and heated/cooled by its solar array and geothermal system. The on-site battery provides resilience and ensures energy reliability.

Both houses have opted into the SEU and are able to share energy through an SEU-enabled interconnection.

This house has utilized the SEU for an on-site battery, providing energy resilience, while also taking advantage of SEU-enabled energy efficiency and equipment replacement programs.

HOW WOULD IT WORK?

A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE SEU

INDIVIDUAL SOLAR

TODAY

Current Scenario, No Outages

● DTE ● SEU



Most residents receive their power from DTE, while some supplement that power with renewable energy like solar.

Current Scenario with DTE Outages



Most residents are without power when DTE's infrastructure fails, while some keep the lights on using renewable energy like solar, paired with battery storage.

SHARED SOLAR

POTENTIAL

SEU Scenario, No Outages

● DTE ● SEU



Most residents receive their power from DTE and supplement that power with the SEU's renewable energy, dispersed through SEU wires. Some residents only receive power from DTE.

SEU Scenario with DTE Outages



Residents who are subscribed to the SEU retain power by using the SEU's renewable energy. The energy is generated by solar panels, stored in batteries, and dispersed through SEU wires. Residents reliant solely on DTE lose power when DTE's infrastructure fails.

More detailed information about the proposed Ann Arbor Sustainable Energy Utility, including videos, visuals, fact sheets, and technical reports, can be found at a2gov.org/a2seu.

Residents interested in learning more are invited to attend one of two virtual public forums being held on Tuesday, July 16th and Wednesday, August 21st at 6pm to learn more about the proposed SEU.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below are highlights from the FAQs posted on the City's SEU website. Learn more at a2.gov.org/SEU to see [the full FAQs sheet](#).

WHAT SERVICES MIGHT AN SEU OFFER AT THE START?

Rapid solar deployment will be at the heart of initial offerings. In addition to on-site solar generation and energy storage services, the City intends to offer energy waste reduction and beneficial electrification support through the SEU. On-bill financing will be included early in the SEU service offerings as well. Over time, these offerings will grow to include shared energy solutions for multiple neighbors (e.g., microgrids) as well as networked geothermal for sustainable heating and cooling.

WHY DOES THE BALLOT LANGUAGE INCLUDE THE WORD "FEE-BASED?"

The cost of the SEU will only be borne by those that elect to take service from the SEU. In other words, the SEU is rate-based – if you subscribe to the SEU, you pay for your energy usage and participation in the SEU. If you choose not to take service from the SEU, you don't pay anything toward the SEU. This is an important operational point that helps explain why and how the SEU will be funded.

DO I HAVE TO GET SOLAR PANELS ON MY ROOF TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SEU?

No, you do not need to have solar panels installed on your roof to participate in the SEU. Individuals can take advantage of energy storage, energy waste reduction programs, beneficial electrification support, sustainable heating and cooling solutions, and community or neighborhood solar options as part of the SEU. Over time, the SEU can offer more services so businesses and residents interested in receiving service from the SEU can indicate that interest with the City and be contacted when services are available.

WHO CAN JOIN THE SEU? AND WHEN CAN PEOPLE JOIN?

If created, the SEU would be an option for everyone in the City of Ann Arbor, including homeowners, renters, businesses, institutions, schools, libraries, and non-profits. People would be able to join or leave at any time. If you are interested in joining the waitlist for the SEU, all you need to do is [fill out this short form](#).

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN SEU AND A TRADITIONAL MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC UTILITY (TMEU)?

There are varying forms of municipal electric utilities, but the most common is a municipally-owned electric utility that serves a community's electric needs by owning and maintaining the electrical distribution infrastructure (the local "grid") and selling electricity from third-party generators to its customers, which are physically connected to that grid. When a municipality creates a utility in this way, it must "take" the current utility's property through a court process, which seeks to determine the value of the utility's property, including its monopoly interest. Once that price has been determined, the municipality must purchase that infrastructure from the existing utility. Historically, these efforts can take the greater part of a decade and cost millions to litigate, which means the newly formed municipal utility will have significant debt that its residents must bear associated with taking over the previous utility's business and infrastructure – infrastructure that may not be in the best condition. Additionally, the municipal utility must determine how it will provide 24-7 power to its customers and meet reliability standards (not to mention decarbonize the power supply) through power purchase agreements, new generation, or other means.

An SEU is a form of public power but one that focuses on generation and not on distribution. In this way, the SEU could immediately focus on deploying clean energy generation, greening our electricity and improving local resilience. The SEU could grow to become a traditional municipal electric utility, but it would not have to do so in order to be successful in supplying clean and reliable energy to its subscribers. The focus of the SEU is generation – not owning the distribution network (aka, poles and wires).

FAQS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Continued from previous page.

DOES THIS BALLOT LANGUAGE CLOSE THE DOOR TO FORMING A TRADITIONAL MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC UTILITY?

No. This ballot language does not close the door to the City forming a traditional municipal electric utility, should the community choose to pursue that path. This ballot language is about creating the structures and systems necessary to create a successful Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU). The SEU could lay the foundation for the formation of a traditional municipal electric utility, but it wouldn't have to.

WILL PARTICIPATING IN THE SEU INCREASE MY ENERGY COSTS?

A rate analysis has determined that the solar only option from the SEU will lead to lower energy rates than what households are currently paying and the solar plus energy storage option will be cheaper than purchasing a home generator. The final rates will be heavily influenced by how many people sign up for the SEU and how the SEU is financed. More details, including a summary of a recently completed rate analysis, can be found at a2gov.org/a2seu.

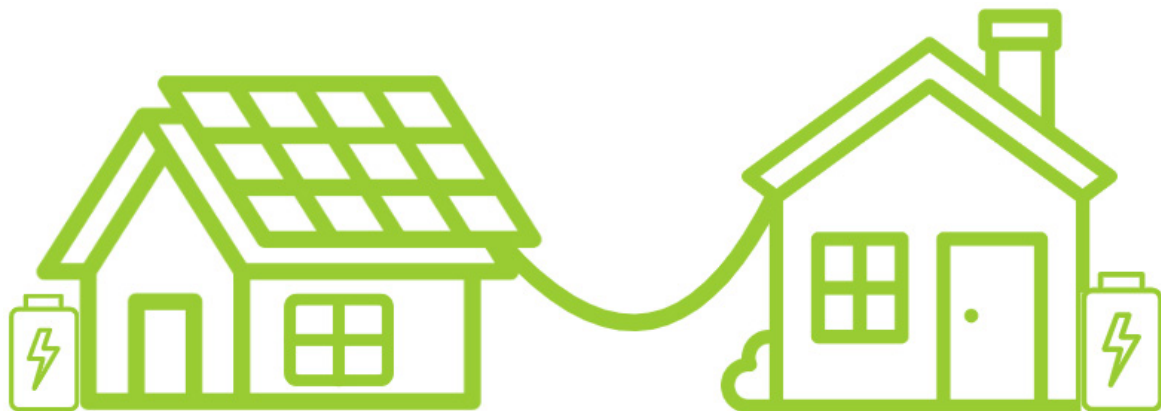
HOW WOULD I BE BILLED IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE SEU?

Participants in the SEU will receive two separate utility bills, one for the energy and associated services received from DTE and one for the energy and associated services received from the SEU.

WOULD THIS BE RUN OUT OF THE OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATIONS? WHAT TYPES OF STAFF AND HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD THE CITY NEED TO HIRE TO HAVE THE SKILL SET TO EXECUTE THIS?

The SEU would have its own utility staff, similar to the City's water and wastewater utilities. Efficiencies could be realized in billing systems, as these already exist within the City. A governance and staffing structure is still being designed but this program would not be run out of the Office of Sustainability and Innovations, but instead be under Public Services along with the existing City utilities.

Those wanting to dive deeper into the proposed SEU are invited to the City's website: www.a2gov.org/SEU. This page has videos summarizing the proposed SEU, technical reports and detailed fact sheets about the proposed SEU. If additional questions about the SEU remain, residents are encouraged to submit those questions to sustainability@a2gov.org.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

GET A BIRD’S-EYE VIEW OF YOUR WATER USAGE

Summer is approaching, a time when many residents are watering lawns and gardens, washing cars and filling swimming pools. AquaHawk is a free service that allows City of Ann Arbor water customers to efficiently manage their water usage and possibly lower their bills. Customers interested in AquaHawk can create a new account and opt in to receive notifications — including alerts of potential water leak detections and when water consumption levels are nearing the limits of their choosing. [Visit AquaHawk to get started!](#) There’s also [a neat video explaining how to use it here](#).

THE LATEST EPISODE OF **GREEN LIGHT, A²ZERO’S SHOW ON CTN, IS NOW LIVE!**

OSI Senior Analyst Sean Reynolds discusses [the Pollinator Aware Yard Care program](#), which encourages Ann Arbor residents to support native pollinator populations through sustainable lawn care practices.

RESIDENTIAL ENERGY REBATES NOW LIVE

The [Residential Energy Rebates](#) are brought to you with funding from the [Community Climate Action Millage](#) passed by voters in 2022. These rebates will help Ann Arbor residents make improvements to their homes and invest in cleaner transportation options to reduce carbon emissions, lower energy usage, and help move the City towards our A²ZERO goal of a just and equitable transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030. The informational website is now live, and the portal to request a rebate is open to all residents within the City of Ann Arbor.

NEW BILL ENABLING SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITIES AT HOAs

[The legislature has passed and Governor Whitmer has signed new legislation](#) that prohibits Homeowners Associations (HOAs) from limiting access to on-site solar as well as heat pumps, clotheslines and other energy efficiency measures. OSI has published [a model energy policy template for HOAs](#), and residents living in HOAs who would like to learn more about how [the Solarize program](#) might help their communities can contact Connor Dailey at cdailey@a2gov.org.

A²ZERO HOME ENERGY ADVISOR PROGRAM

The A²ZERO Home Energy Advisor (HEA) program offers Ann Arbor residents free home energy assessments to evaluate the health, safety and energy efficiency of their homes and explore potential for improvements that will help homes become healthier, greener and more affordable. In addition, the HEA offers residents advice regarding project selection, contractor connections, bid reviews, available rebates, incentives and financing to help fund identified improvements. Residents can visit a2zerohea.org to complete the program’s intake form and indicate interest in receiving an HEA assessment.

GAS LEAF-BLOWER RESTRICTIONS IN THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR

The use of gas-powered leaf blowers will be prohibited within Ann Arbor city limits June 1 – September 30, 2024. The purpose of this ordinance is to protect the health and welfare of Ann Arbor residents as well as to promote the City’s sustainability goals by reducing noise, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and other negative effects of gas leaf blowers. You can report violations of the ordinance to the Ann Arbor Police Department Community Standards at (734)-794-6942. If you are interested in learning more about the ordinance, alternatives to gas leaf blowers, how to sustainably dispose of gas leaf blowers, or sustainable lawn care, we recommend taking a look at our [gas leaf blower phase-out](#) and [pollinator aware lawn care webpages](#). If you have any questions, please reach out to Carissa Ebling at cebbling@a2gov.org.

TheRide GRANTED \$25 MILLION TO FUND ZERO-EMISSION BUSES, REFUELING STATIONS

The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, also known as TheRide, was [awarded a \\$25-million grant to support its transition to zero-emission buses](#).

A²ZERO IS NOW ON INSTAGRAM (@A2ZERO2030) AND FACEBOOK (A2ZERO)!

A special thank you to everyone who collaborated, visited, and participated in A²ZERO Week 2024 and made it such a success!

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY UTILITY (SEU) WEBINAR | Tuesday, July 16, 6 – 7PM | Virtual

Join us for a special webinar to learn more about Ann Arbor's proposed Sustainable Energy Utility, an optional, supplemental community-owned energy utility that would provide 100% renewable energy from local solar and battery storage systems and networked geothermal at participating homes and business in the City. This virtual event presents an opportunity to learn more about the proposed SEU, discover what benefits the SEU could provide, ask questions, and find out what voters will be asked to consider on November 5, 2024. This event is free but [registration is required](#). A second webinar will also be hosted on Wednesday, August 21st. [Residents can register for this webinar here](#).

ANN ARBOR SOLAR STORIES | Thursday, August 1, 7 – 8PM | Virtual

One-hour virtual event hosted by the GLREA. Come hear from Ann Arborites who have gone solar, and have a chance to ask them all your questions! [Register here](#) for "Thursday Night Energy Events" to receive meeting links.

THIRD ANNUAL HOME ELECTRIFICATION EXPO | Friday, August 2, 5 – 8PM | Ann Arbor Farmer's Market

Mark your calendars for [the third annual Home Electrification Expo!](#) Join us to learn all about electrification and energy efficiency, and how you can make upgrades in your home. The event includes food trucks, music, free ice cream and induction cooking demos. Attendees can enter to win a free heat pump water heater, electric lawn care services, an induction cooktop, a portable solar/battery unit, and more! [RSVP here for event updates](#).

CLEAN CRUISE | Saturday, August 3, 11AM – 3PM | E. 9 Mile Road between Woodward and Leland, MI

The inaugural "[CLEAN CRUISE](#)" is a milestone event that will showcase the future of sustainable transportation. The event will feature a range of electric vehicles from various manufacturers, demonstrating the diversity and advancement of EV technology. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore the vehicles up close, experiencing their sleek designs, innovative features, and impressive performance. Alongside the showcase of electric vehicles, there will be presentations and discussions highlighting the environmental, economical and health benefits of transitioning to electric transportation, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality. All EV owners are invited to "cruise" around Woodward on the day of the event.

CINEMA AND SUSTAINABILITY SERIES - COOKED: SURVIVAL BY ZIP CODE | Wednesday, August 14, 7:30 PM | Michigan Theater

Join us for the second event in the 2024 Cinema and Sustainability Series at the Michigan Theater! This event will include the screening of *Cooked: Survival by Zip Code* and a short post-screening discussion about the film's topics (additional post-screening talk details coming soon). Tickets are available through [the Michigan Theater event page linked here](#). Can't wait to see you there!

A²ZERO GREEN FAIR | Friday, September 20, 2024 | Main Street, Ann Arbor

Green Fair is coming back to downtown Ann Arbor this fall! This annual event highlights the incredible community of stakeholders working to achieve our shared vision of a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030. If your organization is interested in tabling at Green Fair, applications are now open at a2gov.org/greenfair.

Please visit www.a2gov.org/sustainability/events for more information on our upcoming events.

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