

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
- BRYANT PARTNERSHIP.....2
- PITTSFIELD VILLAGE.....5
- COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK...6
- ANNOUNCEMENTS.....7
- UPCOMING EVENTS.....7

ABOUT THE EDITOR



Jordan Larson (he/him) supports community engagement efforts with Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations. Much of Jordan’s work focuses on building relationships and trust in communities to support neighborhood-scale decarbonization, including those highlighted here! Interested in learning more? Reach out to Jordan at jl Larson@a2gov.org.



Arbor Oaks Park in the Bryant Neighborhood, July 2024.

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 updates around its collaborations and progress toward equitable neighborhood-scale decarbonization in Ann Arbor. 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.

BRYANT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

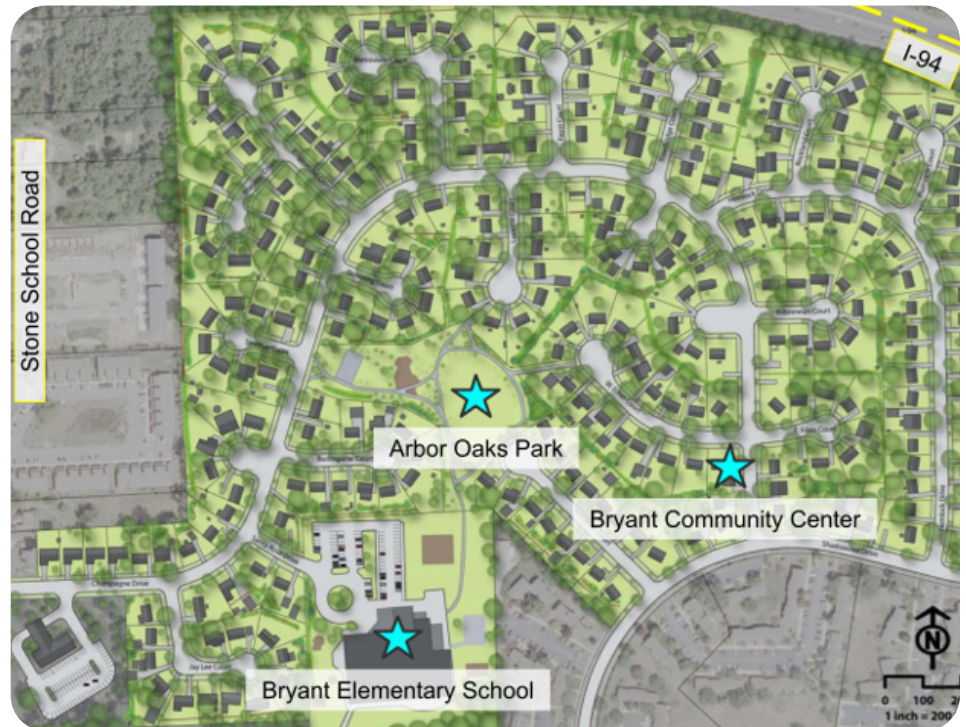
CARBON NEUTRALITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

One of the Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI)'s biggest and most notable community initiatives over the last four years has been the collaboration in the Bryant neighborhood. Since 2021, OSI has been working side-by-side with the residents of Bryant, Community Action Network (CAN), and other community collaborators to make Bryant Ann Arbor's first fully decarbonized existing neighborhood, and one of the first in the country! This isn't just a lofty vision, it's a practical initiative that draws on the expertise of Bryant residents to transform one of Ann Arbor's most diverse and historically under-served neighborhoods into a shining example of the nation's effort to address the climate crisis, while honoring the neighborhood's sense of community and identity. By partnering with and working through CAN, an embedded nonprofit that operates the Bryant Community Center, this work is defining what equitable decarbonization looks like in practice, and what residents want and need from action on climate change in the neighborhood.

ABOUT BRYANT

Bryant is located on the south side of Ann Arbor, just south of the I-94 freeway on the east side of Stone School Road. The neighborhood, as defined by the project, is comprised of Bryant Elementary School, Arbor Oaks Park, the Bryant Community Center, and 262 single-family homes built between 1969 and 1971. Focuses of this work are on high energy burden, addressing flooding and poor air quality, and improving local resilience.

Map of the Bryant Community, with Bryant Elementary School, Arbor Oaks park, and the Bryant Community Center highlighted.



Geothermal rig at the Bryant Community Center drilling the vertical wells for the Center's geothermal heating and cooling system.

UPDATES AND PROGRESS. Over the past year, since our last OSI newsletter covering the [Bryant project in November of 2023](#), tangible and exciting progress has been made! By the end of 2024, this initiative has helped more than 35 households receive home repair and efficiency upgrades through the State MI-HOPE program and County Weatherization Assistance Program, and funding has been secured for more than 50 additional homes to make improvements through those and related programs for 2025. Progress has also been made at the Community Center itself, as the first portion of the building's geothermal system was installed in November. In addition to these physical upgrades, 2024 was also a huge year for fundraising and project development.

BRYANT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

CARBON NEUTRALITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

Michigan Public Service Grant

In September, OSI was awarded a [\\$3.1 million grant from the Michigan Public Service Commission \(MPSC\)](#) for the Bryant decarbonization project. This grant comes from a pot of \$20.8 million the MPSC is awarding to businesses, nonprofit organizations, local governments and tribal governments to fund renewable energy and electrification infrastructure projects in Michigan. This grant will fund the full electrification (excluding HVAC heating and cooling – see below) and solar and battery installations for more than 50 income qualified households in the neighborhood. Work on these retrofits will begin in 2025 and be completed before August 2026!

District Geothermal Department of Energy Grant

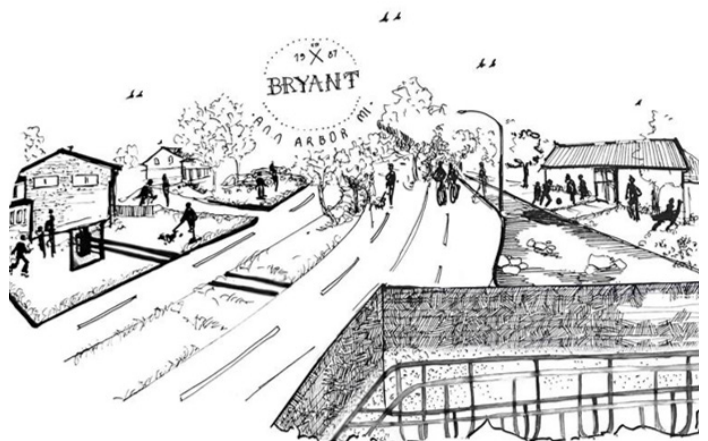
Over the last year, one of the biggest focuses in Bryant has been the exploration of neighborhood-scale geothermal ([learn more about geothermal here](#)). In 2023, OSI and CAN were thrilled to receive a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to plan and design a district-scale geothermal system that could provide up to 75% of the heating and cooling load for the whole Bryant neighborhood.



Jordan Larson welcomes Bryant residents to the 2nd community geothermal workshop, hosted at the Bryant Community Center. April 2024.

Throughout the year-long planning and design process, community engagement was a major priority. Three community-wide design workshops were held at the Bryant Community Center to show residents how geothermal works, get feedback and input on the system design, and answer questions. Monthly community events, such as movie nights and holiday parties, were also hosted at the Center and used as opportunities to reach more residents about the project. Additionally, members of OSI's ClimateCorps also did extensive one-on-one outreach, knocking on every door in the neighborhood more than three times to personally invite residents to the workshops and community events, and inform folks about the project and how to get involved.

After many months of complex technical and community-driven design work and engagement, the team submitted a system design to the DOE in October of 2024. Based on the merit of the design and engagement process, the Department of Energy selected [our project for implementation funding!](#) With this generous \$10 million grant, OSI aims to drill and install the borefields and pumping infrastructure that will power the whole system, as well as an initial portion of the distribution system that will bring geothermal to households. Additional distribution loops will be added to the system to connect more households in future phases of this project. Without the passion and high level of engagement from the community, and the commitment and tenacity of the project team, this would not have been possible. Ground-breaking on the geothermal system will begin in the second half of 2025.



A freehand sketch of what district-scale geothermal could look like in Bryant, by Priyanshi Soni. Courtesy of IMEG.

BRYANT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

CARBON NEUTRALITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

Telling the Story: Growing Media Attention

With all the progress made recently, the Bryant project is steadily gaining attention and traction outside of Ann Arbor, both nationally and internationally. Early in 2024, the McKnight Foundation, one of the early funders of the Bryant project, produced and released a [video promoting the project](#) and the amazing work CAN is doing in the community. Then, just this past December, [TIME Magazine released an article on carbon neutral neighborhoods](#) that heavily featured the work in Bryant, highlighting the importance of pursuing decarbonization in energy-burdened communities. Lastly, while it has not been released yet, the BBC sent a film crew out to the neighborhood to film content for an upcoming story segment on Bryant and neighborhood decarbonization. Storytelling is one of the best ways to inspire others, and rooting community work in the lived experiences of residents and community leaders celebrates not only that this work is possible, but that neighbors we know and respect are making it happen.

TIME

TIMECO₂ FUTURES

The Rise of Carbon-Neutral Neighborhoods

6 MINUTE READ

BY **MARINA LOPES** AND **VIDEO BY ANDREW D. JOHNSON**

DECEMBER 18, 2024 7:00 AM EST

Across the Atlantic, a neighborhood suffering from surges of rainfall and flooding was stepping into a sandbox of its own. Bordered by a landfill to the southeast and Interstate 94 to the north, the Bryant community of Ann Arbor, Mich., was an unlikely candidate to become a trailblazer in carbon neutrality. But the working-class community of 262 single-family homes is on track to be **America's first carbon-neutral neighborhood**, according to the city government. Just three years ago, Bryant was what city planners call energy-burdened. Many residents lived in houses with poor insulation, and utility bills consumed up to 30% of their incomes, according to city officials. An outdated drainage system could not cope with the now frequent bouts of rain, leading to constant flooding.

An excerpt from the Time Magazine article "The Rise of Carbon-Neutral Neighborhoods".



A still from the video produced by the McKnight Foundation.

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PITTSFIELD VILLAGE

FORMING NEW COLLABORATIONS

A key objective of the Bryant project has always been to capture lessons learned from the process and create a blueprint for neighborhood decarbonization that can be replicated in other communities. Decarbonizing a whole neighborhood will be a remarkable achievement, but Ann Arbor must expand beyond the boundaries of Bryant to achieve A²ZERO's audacious goal of a just transition to carbon neutrality city-wide by 2030. As such, over the course of 2024, OSI has been in the process of developing relationships and trust in other neighborhoods. We are thrilled to announce OSI's new collaboration with Pittsfield Village, the next priority neighborhood collaboration for community-scale decarbonization that centers the needs, health, comfort, and safety of residents.



Nestled between Washtenaw Avenue and Packard Street on Ann Arbor's Southeast side, Pittsfield Village is one of Ann Arbor's largest, most recognizable, and historical neighborhoods. Featuring winding streets, Pittsfield Village is recognizable for its distinct architecture, gorgeous

Pittsfield Village has always been and remains an important neighborhood for affordable and accessible housing in Ann Arbor. Issues that residents are most interested in addressing include flooding, which has a prevalent history in the area and will likely worsen over time as climate change increases the frequency and severity of heavy precipitation events, as well as improving energy efficiency and utility bill affordability.

Looking Ahead:

With the collaboration formalized, Pittsfield Village is poised to develop this work and grow this collaboration in earnest in 2025. While large-scale projects will take time to develop, plan, and fund, there are many actions that residents are looking forward to starting in the new year, including community discussions about priorities and aspirations, completing home energy assessments through the free Home Energy Advisor program, and developing strategies and pathways for electrifying the neighborhood at-scale. Pittsfield Village is just getting started!

The heart of Pittsfield Village lies in its residents – a vibrant, passionate, resilient, and engaged community. Many residents have been engaged in pursuing and supporting the A²ZERO plan, with resident-led groups focusing on expanding Pittsfield Village's sustainability efforts and community leadership that is eager and enthusiastic about the transformations this collaboration can bring to the neighborhood. The collaboration began in large part because residents and community leaders reached out to OSI at the end of 2023 to learn about how to get more involved in climate action and advance sustainability initiatives in the community. For these reasons, Pittsfield Village and OSI are well-positioned to collaborate on a long-term neighborhood decarbonization and sustainability effort driven forward and led by the community.



OSI staff with residents, board members, and committee chairs from Pittsfield Village, take a group photo after adopting Standard Operating Procedures, which will guide the collaboration. Dec 2024.

COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

A²ZERO COLLABORATOR SPOTLIGHT



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

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. Through a network of community centers, 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 goals serve as the pillars of CAN's programming.

EDUCATING CHILDREN &

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](#).

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](#).

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](#).

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."

Learn more about CAN's impact, partnerships, and growth over the last year in their [23-25 Annual Report](#).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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 our local rebates. Learn more at a2zerohea.org.

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. Learn more and apply at osi.a2gov.org/ambassadors.

Conquer the Cold: The Challenge Returns January 20 - February 20! Conquer the Cold is an annual promotion that aims to show that it isn't as difficult to get to work without driving as it may seem in the winter months. Learn more and join the challenge at getdowntown.org/events/conquer-cold.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Learn about how home energy efficiency & electrification will reduce your energy costs and your carbon footprint, as well as the many incentives – federal, state, local & utility – that will lower the cost of your investments. [RSVP here](#).

Climate Action in 2025 and Beyond: Creating a Resilient and Just Future in Michigan and Across the Globe | *Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025, 4:30-6:30 PM* | *Rackham Amphitheatre, 915 E Washington St., Ann Arbor*

This event is free and open to the public. In this community conversation on climate action, featuring Dr. Missy Stults, Director of OSI, we bring Michigan and community voices together to amplify our shared commitment to tackle the climate crisis, create sustainable and just systems and center environmental justice. [RSVP by January 10](#) to ensure we have an accurate food count, minimizing waste and maximizing our impact.

Venue Connect: Visionary Voices, a Conversation on the Sustainable Energy Utility with Dr. Missy Stults
Wednesday, Jan. 15, 5 – 6:30PM | *Venue by 4M, 1919 S. Industrial Hwy, Ann Arbor*

Venue Connect, in partnership with Ann Arbor SPARK, is pleased to welcome Dr. Missy Stults, Sustainability and Innovations Director for the City of Ann Arbor. Join us for an insightful conversation as we explore accessible renewable energy using Sustainable Energy Utilities (SEU) and how community-owned energy solutions can transform our neighborhoods into models of resilience and sustainability. [Learn more about this free event online](#).

Seeds to Community - Winter Sowing Workshop | *Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 18th & 19th, 2025*

Plant seeds now and set them outside, where they will start growing as soon as Spring warmth arrives. Extra supplies available to share. [Learn more and RSVP](#).

Sustainability Forum: Natural Features and Me | *Thursday, Jan. 30, 6:00 – 7:30 PM* | *Downtown Branch, AADL*

Finding ways to connect with nature in an urban landscape can be challenging. Please join us in the first session of the 2025 Sustainability Forums series and hear directly from the people who are expanding Ann Arbor's urban tree canopy, creating rain gardens to manage storm water and reduce pollution, and establishing native plant gardens to support our local pollinators—and learn how you can be a part of these initiatives as well! Learn more at osi.a2gov.org/events.

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