

SUMMARY PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNITY ENERGY CENTER

As potential partner in the renovation and tenancy of East Side School

Highlights

- ◆ Tremendous educational partnership opportunities with Decorah Schools
- ◆ East Side a showcase for conservation and efficiency technologies in building renovation
- ◆ Synergistic funding opportunities could help defray renovation costs
- ◆ Potential economic benefits to the community of millions of dollars annually through programming and assistance to homeowners and the commercial sector
- ◆ A gift to future generations through the reduction of our greenhouse gas emissions
- ◆ The time is right – in grant opportunities, federal incentives, technology, public concern

Why do we care about energy?

Nothing has contributed so much to our present-day standard of living and quality of life. Conversely, nothing has such potential to enhance *or to degrade* the quality of life for our children, grandchildren, our working landscapes, and their wild inhabitants.

Energy is the single largest drain on local economies, costing Winneshiek County (per US Department of Energy figures) somewhere between 60 and 100 million dollars annually, almost all of which leaves our community and economy.

Energy – its use, pursuit, dependence, and control – is directly involved in every major geopolitical issue in the world today, including terrorism, economic growth and development, the Iraq war, political instability, and more.

Energy use is at the heart of global climate change, which is proceeding faster than most models have predicted. We in northeast Iowa are especially vulnerable due to a cold climate, rural transportation needs, and an agriculture-based economy.

But why a “Community” Energy Center?

Because common sense and experience tells us that we can solve our local problems and needs most effectively at the local level – nobody will do it for us. As the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) points out: “When households, businesses, and government cut energy expenses, they have more disposable dollars to spend on other priorities. Local schools can spend more money on education instead of on lighting classrooms. Businesses can increase productivity instead of pouring money out their windows. And families can increase their quality of life instead of worrying about high heating bills.”

Estimates based on RMI data show that even with relatively low participation rates, Winneshiek County residents could save over a million dollars a year simply by adopting available and cost-effective energy conservation and efficiency technologies in their homes – but we need to take the initiative.

Higher participation rates, and the inclusion of commercial buildings, have the potential to multiply those savings many times over. That could foster many jobs, heat many homes, and enhance the savings of many present and future retirees.

It could also reduce greenhouse gas emissions just from Winneshiek County energy use by tens of thousands of tons per year – a significant gift to future generations.

<p>What exactly could it do?</p>	<p>A community energy center would use education, demonstration, direct assistance, and partnerships to reduce energy costs and imports through energy conservation, improved energy efficiency, and the generation of local renewable sources of energy.</p> <p><i>Education:</i> the center could offer a wide range of educational programming for schoolchildren, their parents, and the public at large through an on-site resource center and a trained educator on staff. It could possibly even develop a hands-on science activity center focusing on energy, people, and the natural world.</p> <p><i>Demonstration:</i> with the vast majority of energy savings available through conservation and efficiency improvements in existing homes and buildings, the renovation of East Side would be an opportunity to showcase a wide variety of methods, materials, and technologies currently available to homeowners and the commercial sector, even in portions of the building not occupied by the center itself.</p> <p><i>Direct Assistance:</i> staff could provide on-site technical assistance to homeowners, businesses, or other public entities in areas such as energy audits and metering technologies, assessments and recommendations, installation, and funding avenues for energy conservation and efficiency adoption.</p> <p><i>Alternatives and Renewables:</i> the Center could partner with local institutions to study, fund, and implement local sources of energy, such as wind or solar with local schools or governments, landfill methane recovery, animal waste generation, etc.</p> <p>A broad array of <i>focused initiatives</i> could be pursued with significant energy saving potential, such as a green building program, tours of efficient new and renovated homes, local food systems, land use and transportation issues, agricultural tillage systems, and more, depending on interest, funding opportunities, and expertise.</p>
<p>Why would it be a good fit for East Side?</p>	<p>East Side School needs significant renovation from the inside out. An energy center needs space, and an opportunity to showcase energy conservation and efficiency technologies, in use, to the community – a match made in heaven? No, just Decorah.</p> <p>Clear potential for collaboration in educational programming with the school district.</p> <p>If started early, the Center has great potential to defray building renovation costs through pursuing grant and private funding sources not otherwise available, and through sponsorship/partnership opportunities with businesses and corporations.</p>
<p>How would it be structured and funded?</p>	<p>A non-profit corporation would be formed during the ESSDC fundraising phase, and develop the widest range of applicable grant funding sources, both public and private, for space renovation and initial staffing and programming.</p> <p>It could also work closely with local and regional businesses to develop partnership opportunities for portions of the renovation in exchange for showcasing their contributions and services to the public once the center is in operation.</p> <p>When school renovation looks likely to proceed, grant applications can be submitted and funds used concurrently with ESSDC renovation funds to achieve a state-of-the-art energy efficient community building and Community Energy Center.</p>
<p>The Upshot</p>	<p>Strong educational partnership with Decorah Schools</p> <p>A perfect match for East Side building in terms of space and funding opportunities</p> <p>Unique in the Upper Midwest and a model for other communities</p> <p>An innovative, dynamic contributor to the health and vibrancy of Decorah and Winneshiek County, economically and otherwise</p>