

MH Life Podcast  
Season 1, Episode 2  
Capturing the Sun: MH Solar Canopies  
Text Transcription

Drew Edelstein : Hello, everyone. Welcome to the MH Life Podcast. This is hosted by the Maryland Heights' Communications Team. My name is Drew Edelstein, the Communications Specialist for the city. And I'm here today with Tina Politowski, Management Assistant with City of Maryland Heights', Economic Development Department, and Samantha Williams, or Sam, Community Development Executive with Ameren Missouri.

Many people may have seen this construction in the last couple of months take place in a parking lot between the community center and Aquaport, and we received a few questions asking what the structure is. We're here today to learn a little bit more about this project known as the solar canopies.

First question for you, Sam. Do you know how the project began?

Sam Williams : Yeah. So first, just want to thank you so much for having me on behalf of Ameren Missouri here. This has been a wonderful partnership with the City of Maryland Heights. It's something that we're very proud of. We're talking about every day within the halls of Ameren. So everyone's super excited about this project. So how this started, so a couple of things. We had Marco Tipton, my manager, Manager of Community Development and Local Government Affairs, he and Dan Stroh with Ameren, reached out to the City of Maryland Heights, educated them about our Neighborhood Solar Program and saw that there was some interest there.

Thankfully, the city was interested. We worked together to make sure that we were able to get them in the Neighborhood Solar Program and offer sustainable energy for customers. So that's really how it originated. Just having those conversations with the community and sharing what incentives and offerings that Ameren provides.

Drew Edelstein : Perfect. That's so cool.

Tina Politowski : Sam, how does the Neighborhood Solar Program work and how many projects like this have you done with Ameren so far?

Sam Williams : So Ameren Missouri's Neighborhood Solar Program is part of our smart energy plan, and that's just fancy for infrastructure investment. The Smart Energy plan allows us to invest in infrastructure to support service reliability and system resiliency. Thanks to the Missouri legislature who passed legislation for us. And a part of that is the solar panels. And so what you'll see at the Maryland Heights Community Center is a huge complex and you'll see our solar panels with 1,335 solar modules, which will provide roughly 500 kilowatts of energy per year. That's roughly about 55 homes a year. So whenever you see it, just think, hey, that's powering 55 homes a year.

One of the coolest things about the new solar program that will be good for the residents to know is that the new solar array will provide more clean energy for the community at no added cost to the city. So I think that's a huge win.

And you asked how many projects we have like this or what's in our program? So what's really cool about this program is we opened applications up to everyone within our service territory and we

received about 100 applications. And out of the 100 we created six total canopies. Now, two of the canopies are on Ameren Missouri's property, so we can monitor them, see what's going on with those solar panels. And that way we understand real time what our customers are experiencing. Now, the other four, they're around our service territory.

And so, a couple of them that I wanted to highlight for you that I thought was pretty interesting is: we have a solar canopy that's been up and running for nearly two years at Habitat for Humanity in Saint Louis City off of South Grand, We have another one in Saint Louis City that's coming up is called the one at the Delmar Divine. That's a little bit north of Forest Park in a historic neighborhood called the Westin. And we chose that site because it's a long term underserved community. And so by putting those solar panels on the parking lot next to the Delmar Divine, they'll be able to put that energy back into the community. Another one that we have in operation is at SEMO University's Show Me Center in Cape Girardeau. And then now the latest one is going to be in Maryland Heights. And so we're really excited about this because all of these canopies are allowing us to inch towards our goal to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2045.

Drew Edelstein : That's great and I love how you talk about investing in communities and I mean not even just in Maryland Heights, but other communities around the region and some that are historically underserved. It's great that Ameren's focusing on that and working so hard to reach that goal. It's really awesome to hear all that. Thank you.

Do you know around how long the construction took for the canopies in Maryland Heights?

Sam Williams : Yeah. So it took about less than a year and we worked very closely with the city to minimize the impact to local residents. And so we try to make sure we were careful during the busy season for Aquaport. So the city of Maryland Heights is equally, you know, for credit for this as Ameren because us working collaboratively allows us to get these projects knocked out with minimal interference.

Tina Politowski : How long are the canopies designed to operate and are they weather resistant?

Sam Williams : So they're about a 30 year design life for the canopies and they are weather resistant. So we did design them to stand up to the four seasons we experience in the Midwest because, you know, any week in the it can go from summer to winter. I like to say in St Louis especially, you got to wear your raincoat, your winter boots and make sure you have everything in the car. So yeah, we designed them to stand the weather.

Tina Politowski : How does the project further Ameren sustainability goals?

Sam Williams : So kind of speaking to what you know, what I described earlier is it helps us reach our goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2045. And how it does that is it allows us to add clean energy to the grid. And it's a great way of making use of space. You know, if you have a huge parking lot and we were able to put those solar canopies above the parking lot, we don't have to find additional land. You know, it provides covering for anybody that parks underneath it. It allows the energy to go right back to the grid. It also adds jobs. A lot of people don't think about that. It adds jobs in the initial installation and then the ongoing maintenance.

It also offers an educational opportunity. The other thing is, if we think about the landscape across Saint Louis County and we think about just looking at our skylines, it gives a good visibility along I-270. And I don't know if you've seen it. We have a few panels that like if you're going to Jefferson City, you can see them along 70. A lot of times just the seeing that and it sparks questions and people are like, oh, what's that? And then they get more interested in clean energy and sustainability. So having that visual representation is definitely going to help.

The other thing is, like I said, it helps us step closer to our net zero carbon emissions. But I think more importantly, when I think about the community and I think about the residents of Maryland Heights, it helps the residents get closer to sustainability, as well. You know, like I said, it becomes a beacon in that community of this is something that we want to move towards.

Drew Edelstein : I love your point about the 270, because I know a lot of people when they see our community center, it's a very unique design for the area. And I, I know the first time I drove by it I was like, what is that? You know? So I think that the solar canopies on top of that just make it even more eye catching and draw more obviously light to the city, but also to those canopies, as a part of it. So that that's awesome. I hadn't even thought about that until just now.

This one might be more for you, Tina. How does the project further Maryland Heights' sustainability goals?

Tina Politowski : I think similar to Ameren, I think Maryland Heights is trying to make small changes throughout the daily operations, and this just kind of helps bring us to the forefront and help people realize that Maryland Heights is being conscientious about those things and trying to make a difference for our community and our region.

Drew Edelstein : No, that's awesome. Are there any other similar projects, either an Ameren side I know you mentioned a few other canopies that were being worked on or on the Maryland Heights' side that you'd like to highlight while we have this time?

Sam Williams : Again to kind of showcase some of those canopies, again, Maryland Heights is our newest one, but we have one that we're working on at the Delmar Divine in Saint Louis City, kind of in the west end area and north of Forest Park. We have one that has been up and running for two years at Habitat for Humanity in South Saint Louis, along the South Grand. And then we have a canopy that's in operation at SEMO University Show-Me Center in Cape Girardeau.

But kind of like circling back to what this does for the community and how this supports Maryland Heights' Sustainability Goals, one of the things that I've seen already, you know, I've been with Ameren for about six months, but Maryland Heights, we talk about very positively, very frequently, and it's because the city is very willing to lean into those sustainability efforts and always coming to us and saying, "Hey, what do you have next?" Or "What is what is out there that we may not know about?" And so I think the residents need to know that they have a city that's looking out for them and that's always asking what's next? How can we be best of class in this area? And I think that speaks to the testament of how the city is very concentrated and serious about sustainability goals.

We don't see that from everybody. You know, a lot of people have a varied interest in it. But I would say to me, Maryland Heights is one of the premier communities really doubling down in this area, making sure that our grid is sustainable. So we thank Maryland Heights for that partnership.

Tina Politowski : We thank you for allowing us to be part of it.

Sam Williams : The other thing is this is a shared win if you want to include this. But recently North County Inc recently presented Ameren Missouri with the Community Development Leadership Award, and we took pictures with Jim Carver and to make sure that we share that recognition and the positive impact the project has already had. It's hot off the press. It was only two weeks ago. (Laughs)

Tina Politowski : (Laughs) Yeah.

Drew Edelstein : Yeah. No, that's awesome. I hadn't even heard about the award. That's amazing. Ameren was able to get recognition for those investments. And then, do you know of any similar projects going on in Maryland Heights as far as, like, sustainability goes?

Tina Politowski : We have partnered with Waste Connections to create a sustainability campus off of Creve Coeur Mill Road. It's roughly five acres. There are two greenhouses there that hopefully we can get to net zero soon on those. One greenhouse will be run by Pattonville High School for their Life Sciences program and there will be an interpretive center that will be open to the public. They can do tours with Waste Connections, visit Champ Landfill, hear about their sustainability efforts and what they're doing to make a difference. So that's a really big project that we're all really proud of, really excited to get kicked off. Hopefully we can kick that off this summer and it'll be a huge draw for the region for people to visit and there will be trails to visit and walk through and learn about water retention and all kinds of things that you can do at your own home and on your own property to make a difference.

Drew Edelstein : That's awesome. Yeah, and I'm really looking forward to that, Tina. Thank you.

Tina Politowski : On that note, I could add the City won Innovation Award from the Missouri Municipal League for our Sustainability campus. So that's awesome to be recognized for the things that we are trying to do.

Sam Williams : And to your point, even getting recognized by your peers, you know, because municipal league, that's all the local mayors, you know. So it shows that you're, you know, your best in class.

Drew Edelstein : Yeah. And I mean because it obviously it's always one thing to say like we're trying to provide the best services or be innovative, but it's another to have projects like this or the Sustainability campus have a tangible impact on our community. And it's great to hear that that's being seen as well by all parties involved.

Tina Politowski : And to have several public-private partnerships that are working so well together.

Drew Edelstein : Yeah, So to all our listeners out there, if you're interested in learning more about the Canopies or if you just want to, you know, see them in action when all the parties involved are ready to celebrate, we'll be having our official ribbon cutting ceremony this Thursday on May 25th at 9 a.m. Some of our speakers will include the city Mayor Mike Moeller, the president of Ameren Missouri, Mark Birk, Economic Development Director, Jim Carver, and the Saint Louis County Executive. Dr. Sam Page. We'd love to see you there. We'll have some coffee, breakfast, and it will just be a really interesting time

to learn more about the whole world of sustainability that Maryland Heights and Ameren are both really trying to support and encourage.

Tina Politowski : There will be some E.V. (electric vehicles) for people to kind of sit in and look at, too.

Drew Edelstein : Oh, that's awesome. Yeah. As always, the canopies will also be available for all of our guests going to the community center or Aquaport year round. And we're excited to have that option at the community center now. From the Maryland Heights Communications Division, this is Drew. Thank you so much for listening.

Tina Politowski : I'm Tina with the Maryland Heights Economic Development Department.

Sam Williams : And Samantha Williams, Community Development Executive for Ameren Missouri.

Tina Politowski : Sam, thank you for joining us.

Drew Edelstein : Thank you so much, Sam.

Sam Williams : Thank you.

Drew Edelstein : Thank you for listening and hope you have a great rest of your day.