

The City of Clarksville in western Arkansas is the first in the state to power all of its governmental operations with solar energy. KUAR's Daniel Breen covered today's (Wednesday) opening and has this report.

News11

3:06

SOC

This marks the city's second solar power plant, built through a partnership between the city-owned utility company and Scenic Hill Solar. John Lester, general manager of Clarksville Connected Utilities, says the idea to use solar power came from a contract the city had with an Oklahoma-based power company.

"They allowed us to build up to 7.3 megawatts of solar capacity as part of that agreement so we started looking at the economics of it, the economics worked, so we decided to do the first power plant and at that time it was the largest municipal power plant in the state of Arkansas." (0:18)

The first 5-megawatt plant opened in 2018, and was an investment of roughly \$10 million dollars- about what the city would have spent for eight months' worth of power. Now the city's added a slightly smaller, 2-megawatt plant, enough to power all city government buildings. Scenic Hill Solar C-E-O and former Arkansas Lt. Gov. Bill Halter says the city has embraced the project despite the up-front costs.

"This is a community that embraced the future and said, 'We understand we're taking a little bit of a risk here, we're doing things unconventionally, but it's the right thing to do and it's paid off.' They're going to save money, they're going to lock in a lower price of electricity for the next 35 years." (0:20)

Lester says the energy savings have freed up the city budget to address other infrastructure projects, like offering fiber optic high-speed internet service to the community nestled in the Ozark foothills.

"So we've got about 4,500 households, business customers, and we're doing that fiber to the home project where we can deliver a gig worth of internet to anybody at any location for about 90 bucks a month. So we're adding that utility to our

existing utilities which is electric, water and wastewater. So having that technology and then having a renewable portfolio is becoming more and more of interest when it comes to sustainability in corporate America so we're hoping that it gets us on the radar for future jobs.” (0:33)

Halter says cost savings, coupled with the public boost Clarksville gets from its first-in-the-state status will offer \$5 million in economic development opportunities to the small community of about 9-thousand.

“These two power plants together are producing over 15 million kilowatt hours a year of electricity, and the market value of that is more than \$1.5 million a year. And they'll be doing that for the next 35 years, so it's a real significant economic development benefit for Clarksville as well.” (0:22)

John Lester says the city is embracing being the first in the state to power its government through solar energy, but that it likely won't be the last.

“There are enough projects worldwide for solar that it is real, and that the economics do work now. The reality of it is it's not necessarily a brand new technology, it's just the production efficiencies have driven the cost down enough to really make it economical.” (0:16)

DJB, KUAR News.