



Appleton joins others in Green Tier program to get new look at water issues

By J.E. Espino • Post-Crescent staff writer • December 5, 2010

APPLETON — Homebuilder and land developer Leon Church learned years ago business growth and savings, and green initiatives are closely tied together.

So Church, an Appleton resident and Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corp.'s board president, is pleased a newly formed group that includes the city and WECC is taking a fresh approach to environmental problems in the state. Some say its work could set future standards, potentially reduce the burden on taxpayers and serve as a model nationally.

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Municipal governments are the latest to join the state Department of Natural Resources' popular Green Tier program.

Others joining the charter are Bayfield, Fitchburg, Middleton and Weston. Other Madison-based organizations are 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Municipal Environmental Group Water Division and Center on Wisconsin Strategies.

Representatives from all 10 entities gathered

Wednesday at Trolley Square to sign an agreement. The group's focus will be on water quality and management issues and sustainability practices.

"If we get our cities to think more consciously about our environment, we can reduce costs drastically," Church said.

A regional approach on issues is key, charter members and state officials say.

Consider the effects if all communities in the Fox Valley decided to replace all street lights with LED light bulbs, Church said.

"The energy savings would be unbelievable — millions of dollars every year," he said.

Church has been instrumental in Neenah's efforts to infiltrate stormwater runoff into the ground rather than dump it into Lake Winnebago. The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh is studying water samples to determine whether the city's undertaking is environmentally sound.

He spoke about maintenance costs that cities with storm sewer systems face and the possibility the Environmental Protection Agency might require municipalities to treat stormwater.

Church also pointed to potential energy savings that cities could harness by digitizing documents and reducing their use of printers.

Appleton Mayor Tim Hanna said the charter gives government the chance to catch up to the private sector, which in some respects has been a leader in

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the green movement.

"There's a lot of times we find out we are a best practice. People are looking at us, but we always want to know what are other people doing. That's where you get a lot of good ideas from," Hanna said.

The idea for the charter was pitched to the DNR three years ago by 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.

Executive director Steve Hiniker said the way communities were building was inefficient and costly to taxpayers, and he saw room for improvement.

He is hopeful the charter will help set the tone and criteria for communities statewide.

"We can all make these better places to live, and as we invest in our communities, it makes them much stronger and it makes the state stronger," Hiniker said.

No cost is required for the city to participate.

But Hanna realizes that sometimes being a trailblazer can be costly.

"There's a balance between economics, environment and then how much risk you are willing to take. We work hard to try to balance that," he said.
"Hopefully, most of the time, we get that right."

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