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For immediate release:
April 7, 2015

Rice Creek Commons poised to include largest net-zero energy redevelopment in the state

Arden Hills, Minn. – The Joint Development Authority last night adopted the Energy Integration Resiliency Framework for Rice Creek Commons, the site of the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant, setting a vision to create the largest net-zero energy redevelopment in the state. The forward-looking proposal outlines plans for an on-site 40-acre solar installation and all-electric residential neighborhoods designed to deliver long-term energy cost savings.

“We have an opportunity to use today’s technology to build a sustainable energy future,” said Ramsey County Commissioner Blake Huffman, whose district includes Rice Creek Commons. “By leveraging new advances in energy systems, we can build the foundation for significant cost savings for families and small businesses in the years ahead.”

Congresswoman Betty McCollum, who represents Ramsey and Washington counties and is the ranking member of the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, says the vision outlined in the energy framework could position Ramsey County as a national leader. “I am proud of Ramsey County’s innovative approach to providing sustainable, affordable sources of energy for residents,” said McCollum. “A net-zero redevelopment at Rice Creek Commons, in our own backyard, can serve as a model for communities throughout our state and our nation.”

The proposed 40-acre solar installation (an area larger than 30 football fields) would generate 8 megawatts of electricity, enough energy to power all commercial and residential developments at Rice Creek Commons. Estimates show the installation has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 7,500 tons annually, roughly the amount produced by 1,432 cars each year. Federal tax credits that help offset the cost of the solar installation are available through 2016.

The groundwork for net-zero energy neighborhoods would be made possible by energy generated from ongoing water treatment at the Rice Creek Commons site. Instead of a traditional HVAC system, homes would be heated and cooled by thermal energy captured from groundwater that is pumped through an on-site treatment process. This energy would be enough to meet the needs of residential developments at Rice Creek Commons.

“This approach will make Rice Creek Commons much more attractive to prospective residents and to users of commercial real estate, who are interested in health, the environment, and the bottom line. It’s

good business,” said John Breitinger, chair of the Minnesota District Council of the Urban Land Institute. “This will stimulate demand that will attract developers. It will be exciting to watch the development of a healthy and resilient community that takes a practical, holistic approach and leverages new technologies.”

A key component of Ramsey County’s vision for energy use at the site is pursuing a strategic partnership with the Minnesota Army National Guard, which owns and operates the Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) adjacent to Rice Creek Commons. The Minnesota Army National Guard’s master plan for AHATS includes net-zero goals for energy, water and waste, thereby creating an opportunity for collaboration with Rice Creek Commons.

Next Steps

Ramsey County plans to pursue public-private partnerships to finance potential projects outlined in the framework. An RFP for the solar installation is expected to be released in the near future, with tentative plans for construction to be completed in 2016 and development at Rice Creek Commons powered by the installation the following year.

“Ramsey County and Arden Hills are committed to working together through our Joint Development Authority over the next several years to implement the innovative ideas set forth in the Energy Integration Resiliency Framework,” said Heather Worthington, deputy county manager for Ramsey County.

About the Energy Integration Resiliency Framework

The Joint Development Authority called for the creation of the Energy Integration and Resiliency Framework which was guided by the [Rice Creek Commons Energy Resiliency Advisory Board](#), a five-member appointed advisory taskforce consisting of residents and business owners from Ramsey County and Arden Hills.

“The Rice Creek Commons site is a blank slate, giving us a tremendous opportunity to closely consider all possible energy options,” said David Sand, chair of the Joint Development Authority. “Our goal in creating this plan is to guide future development at Rice Creek Commons and make the site as sustainable as possible for as long as possible. We are grateful for the guidance of the residents who served on the Energy Resiliency Advisory Board and the technical expertise of Ever-Green Energy as we explored energy efficiency opportunities on the site.”

The framework was produced by Saint Paul-based [Ever-Green Energy](#), which has worked with communities like Prospect Park (MN), Duluth (MN), Montpelier (VT), and Arlington County (VA) to develop resilient community energy systems that integrate advanced technologies and renewable energy to create cost-effective and sustainable energy frameworks. The framework project team also included the Center for Energy and Environment, Fresh Energy, and Burns and McDonnell.

The [Energy Integration and Resiliency report](#) is available on the Rice Creek Commons website.

About Rice Creek Commons

Rice Creek Commons is a 427-acre development at the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant in Arden Hills. In April 2013, Ramsey County purchased the site, which was the largest superfund site in the state. The site is expected to be cleaned to residential standards by fall 2015. The redevelopment will include a mix of residential, commercial, and open spaces. When completed, the project will create

thousands of jobs and generate millions of dollars annually in county and state property taxes. More information is available at RiceCreekCommons.com.

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