

Urban Sustainability Innovator Profile: David Norwood

The urban sustainability innovator's path is rarely a straight line. And the distance from an initial idea — whether borrowed from elsewhere or invented at home — to successful implementation is rarely traveled solo.

For David Norwood of Dearborn, Michigan, the idea came from 621 miles away, carried by a case study prepared for USDN. And, as he started to try to apply it, the number of partners grew and grew: first several other USDN member-cities, then an NGO working on energy issues, then neighboring cities in southeast Michigan, and finally the USDN Innovation Fund.

It was the money that first excited David Norwood about Asheville's LED Streetlight program — the possibility of saving his city some money and using it to fund other sustainability projects. "They were generating \$200,000 that could be put into other projects." And since Dearborn was about the same size as Asheville, he says, "I thought it could translate really well."

Right away, Norwood looked for other enthusiasts: "I shopped the idea around city hall." Then unexpected opportunities presented themselves. The city had joined a dozen or so other communities as members of a regional organization focused on energy efficiency, Southeast Michigan Regional Energy Office (SEMREO). Norwood took the Asheville model to SEMREO's leadership. "We had a long discussion about how it might work." At about the same time, the USDN Innovation Fund issued an RFP looking for "breakthrough convenings" that advance innovations. "We had an intersection of opportunities and decided to take advantage of it."

Norwood found other USDN members interested in the LED streetlight program: **Ann Arbor**, **Bloomington**, and **Knoxville**. SEMREO asked if the submission to the Innovation Fund could involve a set of municipalities in southeast Michigan. Some of them were part of the Michigan Green Communities Network that Norwood and Ann Arbor Environmental Coordinator Matt Naud had been building with the Michigan Municipal League. "I said, let's take a shot." Their proposal featured SEMREO as a key partner. "They had the infrastructure to pull together the event, and they had the horsepower to pull the cities together."

With a grant from the Innovation Fund, the process kicked into gear — and some adjustments in the innovation were necessary. Asheville owned its streetlights and, as a result, it was able to save more money on LED upgrades than would be possible for Michigan communities, which did not own the lights. "We couldn't capture as much savings as they did," Norwood says, but there was still plenty of money to be saved.

The effort — not yet completed — will be a great accomplishment for the region, but Norwood says he's even more proud of a smaller innovation Dearborn has rolled out, called [Adopt-A-Watt](#). It's a partnership with a nonprofit started by a retired engineer to line up business sponsors for local energy efficiency projects. "We've done lighting in two parking structures and the library's parking lot," Norwood says. The businesses get recognition: a sign at their place, something on their web site. Dearborn has also received donations that paid for two electric vehicle charging stations. All told, this has amounted to more than \$140,000 worth of business contributions. "It costs the city nothing."

Like the LED streetlights innovation, the Adopt-A-Watt path depended on an outside partner and didn't always follow a straight line. But Norwood is already spreading the word to other cities: "I've talked with the USDN Small Cities Working Group about this."