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HOPEFULS STRESS THEIR  
FARM BONA FIDES**  
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**2020 SENIORS GET  
A FINAL GAME**  
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## District cuts energy bill with solar gardens' installation

By MISTY SCHWAB  
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Faribault has seen a reduction in pollution since the installation of solar gardens last fall, and the school district has seen another reduction — in its energy bill.

To date, Faribault Public Schools Financial Director Andrew Adams said the district saved approximately \$11,300 on energy costs since March. Nokomis Energy, the solar garden provider for the district, expects another \$17,000 in savings between now and December. Annually, the district could save between \$24,000 and \$30,000.

The district currently uses six solar gardens, located in Rice, Waseca and Dodge counties, but Nokomis Energy will complete three more by the end of 2020. After that, Nokomis Energy partner Brendan Dillon said the district could save closer to \$40,000 or even \$50,000 a year.

"That was the number they always wanted to get to because to them, that's a teacher, or a substantial fraction of a new teacher," Dillon said.

Dillon considers schools like Faribault important partners for solar gardens because, as he said, "When a school has an opportunity to save significantly in electricity ... that frees up money for them to spend on education, whether that's more teachers or better facilities."

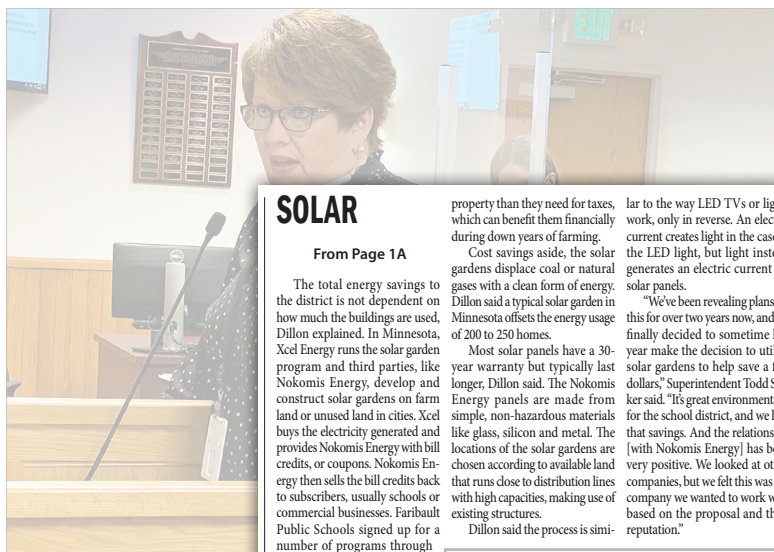
Adams confirmed that the district will take its energy savings into account when budgeting for the 2021-22 school year.

"It will go toward maintaining teacher-to-student ratios and maintaining the structure of the classroom as much as possible, Adams said. "... It could reduce the amount of cuts we need to make next year."

See SOLAR on 3A



Solar gardens have made an impact on the local environment but also reduced the energy bill for Faribault Public Schools since the installation of gardens in Rice, Waseca and Dodge counties. The metal panels use sunlight to generate electricity. (Metro Creative Images)



Denise Anderson, Rice County elections director, will take during Tuesday's primary election a polling place. Also pictured is Assistant

## SAFE A

With plenty of gloves & sa

By ANDREW DEZIEL  
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With state and local primary elections slated for next week, Rice County Property Tax and Elections Director Denise Anderson assured the Rice County Board of Commissioners Tuesday that the county is prepared to run a safe election.

In recent weeks, Anderson has feverishly worked to prepare the county for an election that will take place under unprecedented circumstances. She said that no fewer than eight trainings

have been held up to speed due to the pandemic. Still, Anderson who goes to expect long election lines of voters to come and have taken cordoning off the area, more have requested of Friday, August 7 of Wednesday

## SOLAR

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The total energy savings to the district is not dependent on how much the buildings are used, Dillon explained. In Minnesota, Xcel Energy runs the solar garden program and third parties, like Nokomis Energy, develop and construct solar gardens on farm land or unused land in cities. Xcel buys the electricity generated and provides Nokomis Energy with bill credits, or coupons. Nokomis Energy then sells the bill credits back to subscribers, usually schools or commercial businesses. Faribault Public Schools signed up for a number of programs through Nokomis Energy, which charges it a fraction of the coupon value.

On a local level, Dillon said landowners generate more income with solar gardens on their

property than they need for taxes, which can benefit them financially during down years of farming.

Cost savings aside, the solar gardens displace coal or natural gases with a clean form of energy. Dillon said a typical solar garden in Minnesota offsets the energy usage of 200 to 250 homes.

Most solar panels have a 30-year warranty but typically last longer, Dillon said. The Nokomis Energy panels are made from simple, non-hazardous materials like glass, silicon and metal. The locations of the solar gardens are chosen according to available land that runs close to distribution lines with high capacities, making use of existing structures.

Dillon said the process is similar

to the way LED TVs or lights work, only in reverse. An electric current creates light in the case of the LED light, but light instead generates an electric current for solar panels.

"We've been revealing plans for this for over two years now, and we finally decided to sometime last year make the decision to utilize solar gardens to help save a few dollars," Superintendent Todd Sesker said. "It's great environmentally for the school district, and we had that savings. And the relationship [with Nokomis Energy] has been very positive. We looked at other companies, but we felt this was the company we wanted to work with based on the proposal and their reputation."

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**- Todd Sesker**  
Superintendent of Faribault Public Schools

