

St. Paul Saints stadium builders aim to make it a 'green' field

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Environment



Construction continues at the new Saints ballpark in downtown St. Paul, Minn. Thursday, July 10, 2014. Jeffrey Thompson/MPR News



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It may be hard to envision on a snow-swept downtown corner near two freeways, but the new St. Paul Saints stadium couldn't be more green.

When the \$62 million stadium opens in May, the home of the city's minor league baseball team will take a major step forward as an environmentally friendly sports facility.

A canopy of photovoltaic solar panels next to the baseball field will generate 103 kilowatts of power for Minnesota's newest sports complex, a 7,000-seat facility owned by the city of St. Paul.

"We think it's going to be the third largest solar array at a sports facility in the U.S.," project manager Paul Johnson said.

That's only about a tenth of the power needed to run the lights and meet the energy needs for the rest of the stadium. But it will be a high-profile alternative to conventional electric power. The baseball scoreboard is expected to tout the solar power generated along with the score. Its panels also will shade a group dining area.

Other features will include a storm water filtration system that will take drainage from the nearby Metro Transit maintenance facility roof and use it to irrigate the turf at CHS Field. Rain water also will be diverted to flush 10 percent of the toilets in the restrooms.

Recycling at the stadium started long before fans will see the first game, said architect Logan Gerken of stadium builder Ryan Companies.

Gerken said part of the giant factory that once stood on the site is being reused. The field sits on the factory's basement floor.

"The former Diamond Products building is largely still on site," he said. "All the steel was removed from it and recycled and the concrete of the building was crushed and laid on the site as part of our geo-grid that helps bring stability to the playing field surface."

Making the stadium environmentally friendly came with a cost. The solar project added an additional \$600,000 to the project, and the storm water system added an estimated \$450,000. But grants are covering the extra cost.

Still, the price tag on the solar project has drawn skepticism even from some environmentalists.

Eric Jensen, senior energy associate for the Izaak Walton League's Midwest Office, is encouraged that solar energy will receive such a high-profile installation and that more people will see a practical use for it. But he said the funding from Xcel Energy would have gone further on other projects.

"This is the highest dollar per watt," Jensen said. "It's the most expensive dollar per watt project."

But Gerken, the project architect, thinks even seasonal use of environmentally-friendly facilities can inspire the public to think differently. He cites light rail service at Target Field.

"Many people's first experience with Metro Transit and the light rail was 'hey, let's go to a Twins Game,'" he said. "And now they're used to it, they know about it. ... It's an option to go to the airport; it's an option to go to the Mall of America."

Ann Hunt, environmental policy director for the city of St. Paul, said the innovative stadium features aren't just demonstration projects but part of a larger effort across the city's public sector. Another example of the city's environmental focus, she said, is the solar hot water system for the RiverCentre convention center. Hunt said it's one of the biggest in the Midwest.

"This installation heats hot water to help heat the RiverCentre complex and the Xcel Energy complex and provide domestic hot water for that facility," she said.