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Minnesota Attorney General
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April 27, 2021

United States Representative Ilhan Omar
1730 Longworth Building
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Congresswoman Omar,

I am writing to express my support for the appropriations request from Avivo and Renewable Energy Partners (REP) for the Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC) in North Minneapolis.

Chronic underinvestment, high poverty, and high unemployment/underemployment in North Minneapolis requires new investments to create opportunities. The RATC will be a transformational project that will open the door to skills training in emerging clean energy fields and green jobs for the residents of North Minneapolis. Creating a path to a career in green energy for those who need it most is a powerful way to tackle the biggest issues facing our community. We cannot continue business-as-usual when it comes to closing racial disparities and creating a sustainable energy system.

I appreciate your efforts to seek this appropriation as part of the Congressional earmarking process. My office supports this project and their request for funding.

Sincerely,

Keith Ellison
Attorney General

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2021

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar
1730 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Omar:

I am writing in support of the application for Community Project Funding submitted by Avivo and Renewable Energy Partners (REP) for the Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC) in North Minneapolis.

The RATC is a timely project with a large, diverse group of trusted stakeholders. This facility will create opportunities for low-income residents and BIPOC communities to access training for clean energy and green building jobs. While this facility will be built in Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District, it will undoubtedly serve my constituents in the Third District as well.

I applaud the collaboration of groups including Avivo, REP, Project for Pride in Living (PPL), Xcel Energy, Minnesota State community colleges, and several non-profits to develop the RATC and create a pipeline for well-paying green economy jobs locally. As the United States invests in our clean energy economy, we must ensure that low-income residents and BIPOC communities share justly in the benefits of this transition. The RATC will address this need by providing training for entry-level jobs and career paths to higher-skill positions and post-secondary degree programs in renewable energy, energy efficiency, storage, microgrids, and electric vehicle infrastructure.

For these reasons, I believe this initiative will be beneficial to the communities we represent, and I support funding for this capital project.

Sincerely,



Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

April 26, 2021

U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar
1730 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Omar,

I am writing to express my support for the appropriations request from Avivo and Renewable Energy Partners (REP) for the Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC) in North Minneapolis.

The RATC will bring much-needed access to skills training in emerging clean energy fields and green jobs for residents of Minneapolis and the region. REP has made great progress in bringing together training partners such as Avivo, energy-sector employers, and community-based organizations that will make this project a success.

This project will contribute to reducing disparities in employment skills and household income for BIPOC families in Minnesota. It will help ensure that our young people, low-income residents and communities of color can share equitably in the benefits of clean energy and energy efficiency as further investments are made in those areas.

I appreciate your efforts to seek this appropriation as part of the Congressional earmarking process. My office supports this project and their request for funding.

Sincerely,



Jeremiah Ellison
City Council Member – 5th Ward
Minneapolis, MN

KEITH ELLISON
5TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

October 23, 2015

Mr. Jamez Staples
President
Renewable Energy Partners

Dear Mr. Staples:

It was a pleasure hearing about your work to expand access to careers in the energy sector. I am excited about your effort to create a multi-purpose training facility (MTF) in North Minneapolis, as it will lead to hundreds of stable, high-wage jobs for individuals in a part of our community that needs investment. With a strong stakeholder group – including Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the Minnesota Energy Center, the Minnesota Energy Consortium, numerous unions, as well as other public and private groups – I am confident that the MTF will meet, if not exceed, expectations.

Addressing climate change will require substantial investments in clean energy, as well as improvements to our electrical grid. Projected employment shortfalls in a lot of these trades are a serious concern and warrant innovative solutions. Similarly, chronic underinvestment, high poverty, and high unemployment/underemployment in North Minneapolis require new investments to create new opportunities. Creating a path to a career in green energy for those who need it most is a powerful way to tackle the biggest issues facing our community.

We cannot continue business-as-usual when it comes to closing racial disparities and creating a sustainable energy system. I wish you all the best in your pursuit of the financial and legal support you need to see the MTF become a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keith Ellison".

KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress

MINNEAPOLIS

Energy entrepreneur's plan to create training center in north Minneapolis stalls

Renewable Energy Partners founder is discouraged at delays in his green-tech education center.

By Nicole Norfleet (<https://www.startribune.com/nicole-norfleet/6370611/>) Star Tribune

JUNE 12, 2019 -- 9:49AM

Jamez Staples saw a big opportunity when the state decided to move its workforce center in north Minneapolis.

With the center relocating, it left the 22,000-square-foot building at Plymouth and Fremont avenues and an adjacent parking lot up for grabs. Staples, who owns Renewable Energy Partners, bought the property for about \$1.5 million in 2017. He envisioned a training center for local students and adults to prepare for careers in construction, energy and sustainability technologies.

However, a year and a half later the project has stalled. Minneapolis Public Schools, a potential building tenant, is looking at an alternative training site, and city staff is holding up a \$1.6 million grant awarded to the project citing concerns with meeting the current funding conditions.

"Everybody is running around here talking about disparities. Everyone is talking about the workforce shortage, but nobody is doing anything," said Staples, a North Side native.

Staples said his proposed Minneapolis Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC) addresses the economic disparities of training people of color who live in north Minneapolis as well as the need to grow a skilled workforce educated in clean energy to meet regional sustainability goals.

"We need more workers in this space," Staples said. "We don't have the workforce to do what we need to do here."

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Before the purchase, Staples had lined up the backing of several potential partners and leaders including now-Mayor Jacob Frey, Xcel Energy CEO Ben Fowke and Attorney General Keith Ellison. In late May, about 50 employers and nonprofits met with Staples and his team to talk about potential collaborations, he said.

The Minneapolis City Council in 2018 decided to move Minneapolis to 100% renewable electricity for city facilities and operations by 2022 and citywide by 2030, pointing to scientific research on the threat of climate change.

But, last month, a [report](https://naseo.org/data/sites/1/documents/publications/Minneapolis%20Workforce%20Development%20Assessment.pdf)

(<https://naseo.org/data/sites/1/documents/publications/Minneapolis%20Workforce%20Development%20Assessment.pdf>)

published in partnership with the city's Offices of Sustainability and Community Planning and Economic Development suggested the current electricity and energy efficiency workforce may not be big enough to meet the scale-up in energy efficiency that will be needed to meet the city's goals. The report noted there were opportunities in minority neighborhoods to develop a more diverse clean-energy workforce.

The north Minneapolis neighborhoods of Camden and Near North, where the training center would be located, have a high concentration of black residents, with 25% to close to 40% of overall residents in those neighborhoods living below the poverty line,



MOBILIZE DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

Developing a skilled workforce to support further growth for the Minneapolis work force center in Minneapolis
to sustain energy efficiency and sustainability who

according to Minnesota Compass data.

Yet Staples, who has been working for four years on the RATC proposal, said the city of Minneapolis has dragged its feet with helping him secure the funds awarded (<https://metro council.org/News-Events/Communities/Newsletters/Grants-promote-economic-development-and-housing.aspx>) by a \$1.6 million Livable Communities grant from the Metropolitan Council late last year that he needs to get started on the redevelopment. The project has also received other grants.

For the Livable Communities grants, the city must iron out a contract with the developer before the money is released.

According to the grant application, the training center would start in the existing workforce center that was to be renovated and leased to the Minneapolis School District, the state and other potential partners. The center would expand into a 100,000-square-foot facility to be built on the parking lot.

The training would be available to students as well as adults to develop skills including those pertaining to solar installation, electrical microgrids, stormwater management, electric vehicle charging station infrastructure, and other sustainable careers, Staples said.

Construction for the first phase of the project was supposed to start in June. Staples, who is black, said he believes the holdup is partly because he is not viewed as a traditional developer.

City staff's concern is that Staples hasn't secured tenants yet and the city would be "on the hook" if he were unable to renovate the center and construct the new building, said Erik Hansen, director of economic policy and development for CPED.

"Jamez is an emerging developer and we want to support him," Hansen said. "He doesn't necessarily have the conventional resources that a more established developer like Ryan [Cos.] or United Properties would have. We want to see [developers like Jamez] in Minneapolis, especially in this area. We wanted him to get stabilized and get some cash flow going and then continue to work on getting that 100,000-square-foot building built, but if he's got no tenant, it makes it challenging from a financing standpoint."

Minneapolis Public Schools leaders declined to sign on as a partner until it had completed a study of its future needs, said Julie Schultz Brown, executive director of marketing for Minneapolis Public Schools.

Last month, the school district released details of its comprehensive district design looking ahead to the next four years, which included plans for a new centralized career technical education (CTE) center at North High School. Public feedback is still being gathered about the CTE plan.

The RATC could be a good addition to the school district's CTE plan for example adding electric vehicles to its automotive curriculum, said Michael Krause, a business consultant in clean tech at Kandiyo Consulting who is working with Staples.

Staples said the project could go ahead without the Minneapolis School District. Staples has secured letters of interest in the last few months from several potential training partners such as the Minnesota Trades Academy, CenterPoint Energy, Xcel Energy and others.

Sometimes projects whose scope has changed significantly are brought back to the Met Council and resubmitted and rescored, said Met Council spokeswoman Bonnie Kollodge.

It's something that Staples and his partners are trying to avoid. The city has three years to draw the funds but it could request a two-year extension, Kollodge said.

Staples is modeling the center after a similar project called the Rochester Career and Technical Education Center, which offers classes in agriculture, construction, engineering and more with daytime programming by Rochester Public Schools and Rochester Community Technical College maintaining the center.

Staples' Regional Apprenticeship Training Center could be a game-changer because of its urban location near possible workers when many other training opportunities are in the suburbs, said Jamil Ford, another north sider who is working as the designer of the proposed RATC complex.

"Take race, class, gender out of the picture," Ford said. "Take north Minneapolis out of the picture. Because of the shortage ... you want to get to people. You want to have great transit and access points."

Nicole Norfleet covers the fast-paced retail scene including industry giants Target and Best Buy. She previously covered commercial real estate and professional services.

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North Minneapolis green energy hub wins \$1.6 million grant

Sunday, October 4, 2020 by

Susan Du

In

News

 Jamez Staples's project earned a \$1.6 million grant from the Met Council in 2018. The funds are finally being released to him.

Jamez Staples's project earned a \$1.6 million grant from the Met Council in 2018. The funds are finally being released to him.
Star Tribune

In 2017, first-time developer Jamez Staples took out a private loan to purchase a former state workforce center on Plymouth Avenue in north Minneapolis for a future green energy training center.

Minnesota needs to reduce its carbon emissions, but reports show the state is facing a looming workforce shortage. Prior to COVID-19, the Center for Energy and Environment reported

<https://www.mncee.org/MNCEE/media/PDFs/MN-Energy-Efficiency-Workforce-Gap-3-1-19.pdf>

85 percent of energy efficiency employers had difficulty finding skilled labor – a problem that will only worsen as 29 percent of Minnesota's skilled construction workers retire by 2026.

If the state doesn't find a way to fill this workforce gap, it'll never meet the goals outlined in its 2005 Next Generation Energy Act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2025 and 80 percent by 2050. The state is on track to fail, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

With the Minneapolis Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC), Staples envisioned training the next generation's green energy workers while catalyzing opportunity in north Minneapolis.

In 2018, Staples partnered with the city to apply for a Metropolitan Council Livable Communities grant. Their application stated the training center would start in the existing building at 1200 Plymouth Ave. N., and then expand into a newly constructed, 100,000-square-foot facility that would provide career and technical education for Minneapolis Public School students and adults. The Met Council granted the project \$1.6 million for rooftop solar panels, an electric vehicle charging station, rain gardens, and geothermal heating and cooling, among other sustainable designs.

Then the project hit a few roadblocks.

Although the Livable Communities grant application listed Minneapolis Public Schools as a project partner that would hold classes in the RATC, the district recently decided to create its own tech hub at North High School, and doesn't need to lease space from Staples.

And according to the city, miscommunication tied up the \$1.6 million for two years.

Under the terms of the grant, Staples would have to rehab the existing building on Plymouth Avenue and break ground on the second facility within two years. He never intended to start the second phase of construction within that time frame, yet if the project failed to meet that element, the city would be forced to repay the Met Council the \$1.6 million in full. Realizing that RATC would take longer to develop than the time allowed by the grant, the city had to resubmit its Livable Communities application to the Met Council.

Luckily for Staples, RATC's revised application still scored high enough to earn the \$1.6 million. The Met Council confirmed it will transfer the funds within 35 days.

"I'm positive and upbeat and excited about the progress that we've made," Staples said.

"Despite the challenges that we've run into, one way or another this project will get done, and it will provide the necessary access and opportunity for training in emerging sectors for the youth of this area as well as the broader region to get the skill set to participate, and become workforce and college ready."

Staples has agreed to operate the property for at least five years, and report to the city each year how many people are receiving services there. Staples will have to complete the RATC's renewable energy upgrades and start leasing space to tenants that can offer career training and education. Staples has also agreed to help the University of Minnesota on coursework to engage young people of color in green energy.