

Position Specification

Executive Director of Sustainable Energy Utility

City of Ann Arbor



March 2025



POSITION SPECIFICATION

Position	Executive Director
Company	City of Ann Arbor, Sustainable Energy Utility
Location	Ann Arbor, Michigan
Reports to	City Administrator
Application	If interested in applying for this role, please send your resume to Mark Ciolek and/or Gary Carlson at Preng & Associates. Contact details are at the bottom of this document

ABOUT ANN ARBOR

Demographics

Ann Arbor, or “A2” as it is locally known, is the county seat of Washtenaw County and is situated 40 miles southwest of Detroit and 25 miles from the Detroit Metro Airport (DTW). The community has received numerous recognitions and awards for its quality of life, including Most Educated City, Walk Friendly Community, Top 100 Best Places to Live, Best Digital City in the U.S., and Tree City USA. Ann Arbor is most well-known as the home of the University of Michigan, which influences many aspects of the city’s economy and culture. The university’s 45,000 students and thousands of alumni who call Ann Arbor home make the city an attractive hub for research and technology, including companies such as Toyota’s North America Research & Development headquarters, ProQuest, and JSTOR. Attractions such as the Museum of Natural History, the Hands-On Museum, and the Kelsey Museum of Archeology make science and technology accessible and engaging for residents and visitors of all ages. The city’s proximity to the Huron River offers an assortment of outdoor recreation activities, including canoeing, kayaking, fishing, boating, and a 104-mile inland paddling trail. Wintertime recreation opportunities include snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and ice skating. The city earns the nickname “Tree Town” with 159 parks, miles of hiking trails, and the Matthei Botanical Gardens. Nearby communities like Ypsilanti, Chelsea, and Dexter offer even more arts, culture, and recreational attractions to Ann Arbor residents.



Government Structure

Ann Arbor operates under a mayor-city administrator form of government. City Council members, as well as the Mayor, are appointed to serve 4-year terms, with 2 representatives each being elected from one of the five wards of the City. City staff report to the City Council-appointed City Administrator. The City Council is supported by many topical boards and commissions, each appointed by the Mayor or City Council. Nearly all of the City staff report to the City Administrator; select City business units including the Ann Arbor Housing Commission are separately governed by board members appointed by the Mayor and approved by City Council.

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY UTILITY

Ann Arbor is in the electric service territory of DTE Electric Company, which serves the City pursuant to a Foote Act franchise, and the natural gas service territory of DTE Gas Company, which serves the City pursuant to a franchise agreement. The City itself generates electricity via two river hydroelectric facilities and one landfill gas generator with power delivery to DTE. The City Public Service Area provides drinking water, sanitary and storm water utility services, and solid waste services to residents and businesses. The City, which is one of the few places in the country to pass a tax millage to support its climate goals, also boasts numerous solar energy installations at municipal facilities and supports residents with a multitude of pathways to embracing energy efficiency, renewable energy, and beneficial electrification, among other sustainability enhancements.

In November 2024, nearly 79% of City voters authorized the formation of an opt-in, supplemental, community-owned energy utility that provides reliable, resilient, local, affordable energy from 100% renewable energy sources, known as a Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU). The City intends to realize the SEU's goals through the deployment of solar panels and energy storage systems for participating customers and through the installation of district geothermal systems. The SEU is also authorized to provide other energy-related services, such as energy efficiency and beneficial electrification programs. The SEU will interface significantly with existing City government units and contribute towards achievement of A²ZERO Program goals, including a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by the year 2030. The City's intent is to actively serve customers in 2026, and a wait list has been established and is growing of those interested in becoming SEU subscribers.

OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE

The Executive Director of the City's SEU will lead the launch and operation of the newly formed SEU and will be responsible for overseeing its overall administration, programming, and strategic planning. The Executive Director will report directly to the City Administrator and will work in collaboration with the City's SEU strategic advisory team. Initially, it will be the responsibility of the Executive Director to oversee the process of bringing the SEU from concept to on-the-ground operation, which will include identifying financing options, carrying out work already supported by grant awards, signing up customers, conducting extensive public engagement, establishing technical design specifications, procuring contractors, setting



rates, and deploying renewable energy assets (such as solar panels, geothermal systems, and batteries). The Executive Director will also be responsible for strategically balancing contracted assistance with the hiring of staff as the SEU grows. The Executive Director will oversee the staff and work with key City and external stakeholders to ensure that the SEU's mission in the community is effectively delivered. As the SEU grows, the City intends to explore alternate long-term governance structures for the SEU, such that the Executive Director will have an opportunity to shape the utility's (and the City's) future.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The SEU Executive Director will be charged with building, leading and ensuring the safe, reliable operation of the new utility, all with an eye toward meeting the objectives of this groundbreaking initiative.

Key responsibilities include:

Leadership & Strategy:

- Provide strategic leadership to strengthen and fulfill the mission and vision of the SEU.
- Expand upon the SEU's draft strategic plan, directing short-term and long-term activities to achieve time-sensitive goals and objectives beginning in the 2025 fiscal year.
- Work with the City Administrator, Office of Sustainability and Innovations Director, and the SEU strategic advisory team to ensure that the SEU is integrated and aligned with other key City goals including those associated with A²ZERO.
- Foster a collaborative and inclusive organizational culture that encourages innovation and excellence, adding staff as activities are defined and budget is aligned.
- Serve as a core member of the City's Executive Leadership team, providing timely, holistic, and relevant information to other City departments, the City Administrator, and City Council on SEU-related matters.

Governance:

- Work with the City Administrator, Office of Sustainability and Innovations Director, and the SEU strategic advisory team to establish a cadence of meetings, reporting, and forecasting as the SEU's business activities grow, particularly in the areas of customer engagement, tariff development, energy aggregation and control, and interfacing with other utilities (e.g. DTE, City water, sewer, hydro).
- Develop regular communications for City Council and the community regarding SEU-related developments and activities.
- Upon a successful launch, help develop a recommendation for the long-term governance structure of the SEU.
- Ensure the SEU's compliance with all regulatory and legal requirements, in consultation with the City Attorney's office.



External Relations:

- Serve as the primary spokesperson for the SEU, representing its mission and vision to key stakeholders, including community groups, policymakers, and media.
- Recruitment of key customers to serve as a strong base for growing SEU development and delivery of services, considering the desired timeline and current opportunity.
- Strengthen collaborations and cultivate relationships with City, County, and State government agencies, business leaders, and others to promote the SEU's objectives.
- Promptly, professionally, and effectively respond to and address concerns of customers and the general public on issues relating to the SEU.

Financial, Operational, and Regulatory Management:

- Work with City staff to establish a customer billing system or systems, effective budgeting, financial reporting, and management of SEU funds.
- Work with City staff in SEU budget management, including identifying potential funding sources, building relationships with donors and creditors, and securing funds (e.g., grants, financing) for SEU activities.
- Oversee the setting of rates and charges for SEU services.
- Implement policies and procedures that ensure financial sustainability and accountability in alignment with other City fiduciary and legal requirements.
- Ensure effective day-to-day operation of the growing SEU staff organization within the City government structure.
- Manage grants and all grant reporting responsibilities that related to SEU development and operations.

Human Resources & Staff Development:

- Grow, lead, mentor, and motivate the SEU staff, ensuring alignment and coordination of SEU operations with other City functions including the Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI), Public Services, and the Chief Financial Officer.
- Foster a positive organizational culture that supports the personal and professional growth of the SEU staff and liaisons to other government units, especially as it relates to development and planning.
- Work with the City's Human Resources (HR) department to oversee the recruitment, training, and evaluation of SEU staff and ensure the SEU has a capable, motivated workforce aligned with the strategic plan.

Program Development & Evaluation:

- Oversee the development, delivery, and expansion of high-quality programs and services in the community that align with the mission and goals of the SEU, including those associated with community and rooftop solar, energy waste reduction, battery storage, district geothermal systems, and other energy-related services.



- Identify needed external support and oversee contractors and consultants to enable delivery of SEU-related services.
- Establish and evaluate key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics to assess the impact and effectiveness of SEU services provided, energy delivered, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions avoided.

CANDIDATE REQUIREMENTS

The new Executive Director will be a uniquely talented leader who is technically adept, demonstrates an innovative and strategic mindset, and has the desire and capability to create something novel in the industry.

Specifically, this individual will possess the following:

Experience and qualifications:

- Proven experience as a CEO, Executive Director or in other high level leadership positions within an organization, preferably in energy delivery or municipal utility operation
- At least 10 years of experience in corporate finance, operations, or city government leadership roles with demonstrated achievement of performance-driven goals
- An entrepreneurial and collaborative mindset with outstanding organizational and leadership skills
- Familiarity with diverse business functions such as marketing, fundraising, contracting, customer service, and other aspects of service deployment
- In-depth knowledge of public-facing governance and performance management principles
- A strong commitment to renewable energy deployment, as well as enhancing resilience, reliability, and energy justice
- Excellent communication and public speaking skills
- Demonstrated success in launching a new service offering or start up is preferred, but not required

Skills and Abilities:

- Strong strategic thinking and problem-solving skills
- Excellent interpersonal skills, with the ability to interact with individuals at all levels, including elected officials, City Staff, customers, and external stakeholders
- Proficient in budget development and financial management
- Ability to manage and motivate a diverse team



- Experience in fundraising, grant writing, and building relationships with donors and community leaders
- Familiarity with renewable energy production, energy storage functions, and behind the meter electric resources, particularly at a municipal level
- Preferred: Familiarity with power purchase agreements (PPAs), virtual PPAs, property leasing terms, multi-building geothermal systems, and/or electrical interconnection agreements

EDUCATION

Bachelor's degree in engineering, business, finance, or other relevant area

SUCCESS FACTORS

The next Executive Director of Ann Arbor's SEU will be a seasoned executive with a strong professional will and personal humility. The successful candidate will be a leader who is approachable and visible, brings a high level of energy and passion for the business, works effectively with the SEU's many stakeholders, and is able to drive Ann Arbor's efforts to be a sustainable utility leader.

In addition, the successful candidate will need to possess the following critical qualities and capabilities:

- **Collaborative Leadership Style** – The new SEU Executive Director will interact with employees, colleagues, community officials and customers at many levels. They will have outstanding people skills, being able to inspire and motivate across a diverse group of stakeholders. The successful candidate will be a confident, but unpretentious, collaborative leader who enjoys working with an engaged city council, a highly competent staff and an involved community. They must be skilled in developing strategies and programs that advance the goals of the utility, but confident, emotionally-mature and resilient enough to accept (and seek) input from others and adapt strategies/plans accordingly.
- **Business Acumen** – The new Executive Director will be an intellectually-curious person that has a strong interest in staying abreast and learning about innovations in the clean energy/utility sector. More important, they will be savvy enough to understand the practical business implications of such advancements and be able to proactively adapt the SEU's strategy to incorporate cost-effective opportunities to improve the utility's energy supply, and/or improve the services provided to SEU's customers. Similarly, the new Executive Director will bring the requisite commercial capabilities necessary to best position the SEU for long-term success.
- **Commitment to Sustainability** – The successful candidate must be ardently committed to sustainability and must possess the will and the capability to driving something that will benefit the resident of Ann Arbor and the environments. They will work closely with the City's Sustainability Director to help advance the City's goal of a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality.



- **Adaptability and Drive** – This new leader will be a confident individual who knows what it takes to build a business from scratch and truly wants to do so. Similarly, the new Executive Director must be adaptable/flexible, as they will not have a support team till they build one.
- **Communication Skills** – The selected candidate will be an extremely effective communicator. The new leader should be an individual who ensures that critical information flows throughout the organization and that people feel like they are being heard. They will have experience developing and enhancing stakeholder relationships and be passionate about promoting the SEU within the community, and the larger energy ecosystem. This person must embrace being the “public face” of the SEU.
- **Honesty and Integrity** – The successful candidate must demonstrate a high level of personal integrity and honesty. These qualities will be essential for building and maintaining exceptional working relationships with the City Council, the workforce, city staff, and the community.

For additional information regarding this position, please contact:



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