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**LAS VEGAS SUN**

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henderson:

# Green upgrades on track despite budget cuts

By [Jeremy Twitchell](#)

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For several years, Henderson Mayor James B. Gibson and other city officials have been preaching the virtues of green living as they endeavor to make the city into a model of conservation and efficiency.

And while declining tax revenues have forced the city to slash its budget by 20 percent, Henderson is moving ahead with a citywide \$17.5 million project that will replace more than 26,000 street lights and equipment at almost 40 city facilities with energy- and water-efficient upgrades.

Though Henderson has suspended all planned construction projects as part of the budget cuts, city officials say the energy upgrades will save the city more money each year than the costs to make payments on the \$17.5 million loan.

Over the 14 years of the contract, the city should save about \$30 million, officials said.

Ameresco, the company doing the work, guarantees that if the savings don't materialize as promised, it will pay the city the difference.

"(The guarantee) is key, because when we had conversations with the City Council about this project, they expressed concerns about that kind of expense," Henderson City Architect Mark Hobaica said. "It's a lot of money, and if for any reason it doesn't work ... it's something that we just don't want to risk."

Paul Ira, senior account executive for Ameresco, said once the project is done, Henderson "clearly will end up being one of the greenest cities in the nation for its size."

Ameresco already has worked with Henderson to replace traffic lights at 64 intersections with low-energy light emitting diodes, install a computer power management system on 1,500 city computers and complete an efficiency overhaul of the Justice Facility.

All projects are meeting or exceeding their projected cost savings.

"In this time when budgets are being slashed and projects are being canceled, it's a great vehicle to use to improve infrastructure without using capital improvement dollars," Ira said.

Ira said another priority for Ameresco is to use local contractors and suppliers whenever possible.

On other projects, between 55 and 85 percent of the total project cost has stayed within the local economy. In the Douglas County School District contract, 78 percent of the contract dollars were spent with local companies.

Ameresco received the go-ahead to begin work March 11. Project engineers say they have 16 months to finish, but are planning to be done sooner than that.

Their most noticeable task will be replacing 26,000 city-owned street lights with low-energy induction lighting, which uses less energy, lasts significantly longer and provides a clearer type of light, Ira said. Much of the work in city buildings, including recreation centers, City Hall, Police Headquarters, and dozens of other smaller buildings, will be mostly behind the scenes.

Hobaica said all buildings will remain open while the work is being done, and residents may not even notice what is happening.

The city's Finance Department, on the other hand, will see a dramatic change, Hobaica predicted. Based on his estimates, which take into account projected increases in water and electricity rates, the project will save the city \$1.6 million in the first year, increasing each year to \$2.4 million in the contract's 14th and final year.

The project could pay for itself in under 10 years, he said.

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