Region’s first microgrid begins operations at Spokane community center

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The system is designed to support the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center’s year-round mission of providing food bank services, childcare services, and support for families

SPOKANE, Wash., May 12, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Avista Utilities today announced the start of operations for the region’s first community-based microgrid. This marks the launch of an innovative energy system designed to help the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center (MLK Center) stay open and continue serving the community during extended, unplanned power outages.

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center is a non-profit, community- based social service center located in East Central Spokane, one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Spokane County.

Located at the community center, the microgrid brings together solar power, battery storage and natural gas to provide added reliability when the power goes out, such as during extreme weather or other emergencies.

The system’s solar and battery storage will also help the MLK Center reduce its standard energy bill, allowing for more resources to be redirected into critical community programs.

“We’re here for families every day, and during emergencies, people rely on us even more. This energy system helps us continue that work and keep our doors open for the East Central neighborhood, which means so much to me,” said Freda Gandy, MLK Center executive Director.

On a typical day, the MLK Center will continue using power from the grid, supplementing energy from onsite solar and battery storage. During extended outages, batteries can help keep power flowing, with natural gas backup available if an outage lasts longer than a few hours. This helps ensure the Center remains open and operational.

The project was made possible through grant funding from Avista’s Named Communities Investment Fund (NCIF) and grant support from the Washington State Department of Commerce.

Avista’s NCIF program is the only one of its kind at a Washington utility. It was created in response to the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) to help support energy projects that benefit communities facing greater challenges, including those related to extreme weather and economic or societal inequities.

“We believe the best energy solutions come from working hand in hand with the community. When we listen first and build together, we can create systems that support people today and into the future,” said Heather Rosentrater, Avista CEO and president.

Media package with photos and video is available here for download. Please courtesy Avista Utilities when using this content.

About Avista Utilities
Avista Utilities is involved in the production, transmission and distribution of energy. We provide energy services and electricity to 429,000 customers and natural gas to 386,000 customers in a service territory that covers 34,000 square miles in eastern Washington, northern Idaho and parts of southern and eastern Oregon, with a population of 1.5 million. Avista Utilities is an operating division of Avista Corp. (NYSE: AVA). For more information, please visit myavista.com.

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About the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center
The Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center (MLK Center) is a leading nonprofit advancing equity and opportunity for low-income children, youth, and families in Spokane. Since its founding in 1970 as a small youth drop-in program, the MLK Center has become a cornerstone institution providing comprehensive, culturally responsive social and educational services. The Center addresses immediate needs and builds long-term pathways to stability, self-sufficiency, and community empowerment through an integrated approach.

Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision, the MLK Center is committed to equitable access, expanded opportunity, and fostering environments where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. As a trusted community hub, the organization continues to strengthen families and promote a more inclusive future for Spokane.

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