

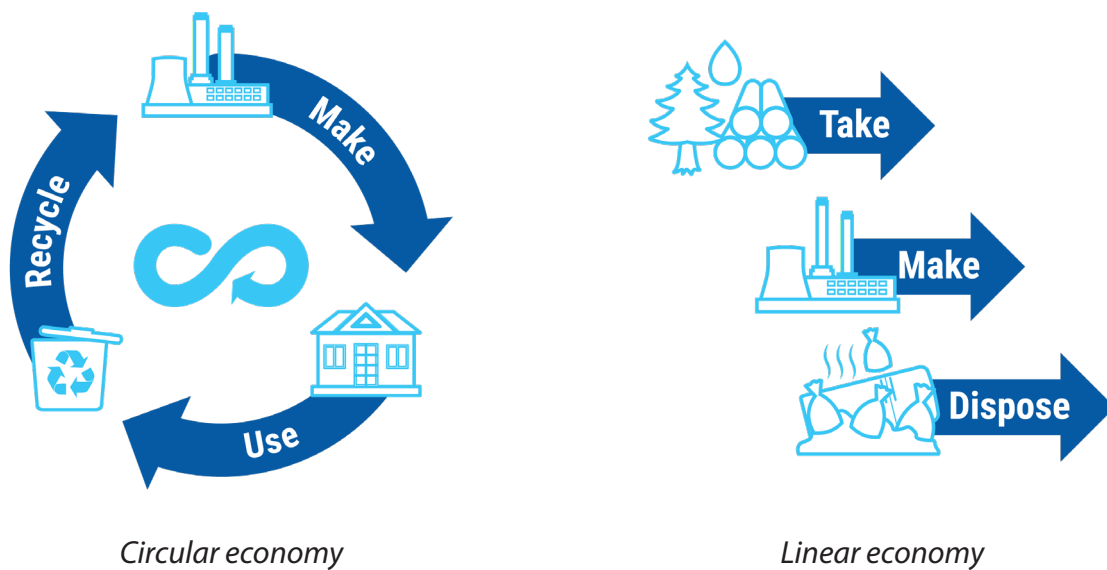
Future forward: Game-changing sustainability trends and innovations for 2024

Nations around the world are working to increase sustainability in an effort to protect the environment. While policies and regulations are essential, individual choices are the real key to significant change. With all the possibilities of a new year before us, adopting sustainable habits and shifting toward a low-waste lifestyle is more feasible than ever. Recent developments in sustainable technology and new eco-friendly innovations make going green in 2024 easy and rewarding.



Welcome to the circular economy

On the road to sustainability, a new economic system is taking shape on the horizon—the circular economy. In a circular economy, there is zero waste as all products are designed and manufactured with reuse in mind, and all waste is recycled, repaired or repurposed. The goal is to establish programs and initiatives that advance circularity, reduce waste and support reuse. These steps minimize negative environmental impacts such as filling up landfills, greenhouse gas emissions and exhausting our natural resources. The circular economy is good for the environment and creates local, sustainable jobs, which are important for a resilient and robust local economy.



From adopting programs to create and share compost to providing tax benefits or financial incentives for companies that adopt reuse strategies, transitioning to a circular economy requires new policies, ideas and trends to advance reuse. Hennepin County knows that maximizing recycling, composting and waste diversion alone is not enough to reach our [zero waste goals](#). Attention and focus must be shifted upstream to address consumption, reuse and waste minimization.

Now, with increased support from governments and consumers, look for more companies and agencies adopting circular production methods to meet demand and propel us into a more sustainable future. Here's our guide to some of the most exciting initiatives and trends to help you go green in 2024!

Eco-friendly cooking

It is estimated that 40% of the food produced in the United States goes uneaten. Not only is that a ton of waste filling up our landfills, but once there, this wasted food rots and produces significant amounts of methane. Some of this food waste results from a lack of awareness and undervaluing of food, poor meal planning and forgotten leftovers. If you are looking to start an eco-friendly eating trend this year, here are some meal-planning tips to help you consume more sustainably in 2024.



Low-waste meal planning – Simply putting some thought into your weekly meals can impact sustainability. The average person spends \$500 annually on food that will ultimately be thrown away! Proper planning and food storage can help. Keep these low-waste tips in mind when stocking your fridge and pantry:

- **Take inventory and make a list** – check your fridge and pantry before you head to the store to discover ingredients you already have on hand. Once you know what you have, you can create a shopping list of exactly what you need and reduce food waste before it starts.
- **Be ingredient-minded** – make sure your meal plan uses the full quantity of ingredients you buy.
- **Shop smart, shop local** – look for locally sourced ingredients and products with limited or compostable packaging.
- **Recycle and compost where possible** – get the entire family involved in sorting their waste into recycling, trash and compost. Young children love sorting and can easily adopt sustainable habits.
- **Store leftovers** – reducing food waste is one the simplest actions we can take to address climate change, so proper food storage is essential. Check out our [food storage tips](#) if you need advice on storing your food, understanding food labels or maximizing your fridge and freezer for food storage.

Sustainable construction

The construction industry, one of the biggest sources of waste and greenhouse gas emissions, promises to implement new sustainable practices in 2024. Smart technologies like cloud-based management software and drones for surveying and inspection will increase building and remodeling efficiency while minimizing construction waste. Companies will also incorporate more reused items and naturally and responsibly sourced building materials in construction. Look for the process of deconstruction to gain momentum as grants and other initiatives encourage builders to reduce waste, energy and emissions by incorporating used building supplies into their projects. Here are some other sustainable construction trends to look for in the new year.



Deconstruction grant program – Hennepin County offers financial support for construction projects that reuse and recycle materials as a sustainable alternative to mechanical demolition during the process of dismantling, modifying or refurbishing a structure. Property owners and developers may be eligible for up to a [\\$5,000 residential deconstruction grant](#) while those with commercial properties could receive up to [\\$10,000 in a commercial deconstruction grant](#). This funding aims to compensate for extra expenses related to the extended time and labor involved in the deconstruction process.

Reuse and repair stores – As more builders take advantage of grants and embrace incorporating reused materials into their projects, look for additional, local [building material reuse organizations](#) that manage and resell deconstructed and repurposed building materials to open their doors this year. Nonprofits, building projects or online platforms like Facebook Marketplace and Next Door are also great resources for used building materials. For those who are ready to jump on the reuse construction trend in 2024, Hennepin County also offers a used [building materials installation grant](#) of up to \$5,000 to offset the additional time and cost of installing used materials.

Farewell fast fashion

Fashion contributes to a significant amount of the total global carbon dioxide output—more than international flights and global shipping combined. Today, more consumers understand the negative environmental impacts of fast fashion choices and are making more informed decisions, which will continue to drive demand for the secondhand clothing industry moving into the new year.

It is predicted that the global reuse and secondhand clothing industry will continue to grow in 2024. This easily adoptable trend is driven by younger, eco-conscious consumers who desire to save money, purchase quality products and shop sustainably.



To help you get started buying and selling secondhand online, here are some of our favorite platforms:

- [thredUP](#) currently describes itself as “the hack to being more sustainable in 2024” with tons of pieces in every style imaginable.
- [Swap](#) will help you find affordable designer clothes for the whole family to get the most from your online thrifting.
- [Retro & Me](#) an online thrift store featured in Thrive Magazine, Retro & Me features 50s to 90s vintage clothing and 10% of their sales go towards charitable initiatives.

With endless secondhand and thrifting resources available locally and online, saying goodbye to fast fashion is easier than ever in 2024. If you are new to thrifting, check out our [guide for thrifting in Hennepin County](#). The only question is where will you shop first?

Renewable energy

With global renewable energy generation expected to match that of fossil fuels in 2024, this year promises to be a boom year for renewable energy with solar and wind power leading the charge. Wind power still has limitations for residential use, but solar technologies are becoming more and more accessible to the average homeowner. Here are the most exciting solar trends for 2024!

Solar energy – Minnesota ranks in the top third of states investing in solar energy. In addition, Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota have a shared goal of using on-site solar energy to meet 10% of our energy needs by 2030. Further amplifying these efforts, the 30% [solar tax credit](#) now extends through 2032 and can be used toward a solar loan, giving more Americans access to this renewable energy source. Some local utilities also offer incentives and rebates to help offset the initial installation cost. Check out our resources for more information on [installing rooftop solar](#). Every solar home has an impact!



Sustainable transportation

Transportation is one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions. However, drivers who purchased vehicles made in 2022 saw a fuel economy increase to a record high of 26 miles per gallon of gas. This is the largest single-year fuel economy improvement made in nine years, indicating the effectiveness of new advancements and technologies in transportation. From more electric vehicle choices, lighter materials usage, fuel efficiency improvements to hydrogen cell technology, these sustainable transportation trends are expected to continue through 2024.



Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail Service – Adding a second Amtrak passenger train to this typically booked route will provide more reliable service and travel flexibility for commuters between the Twin Cities and Chicago. Although this is not an earth-shattering sustainable advancement, it’s an energy-efficient step towards reducing carbon emissions and traffic congestion where we live. A well-connected rail network provides more transportation options for local travel.

Blue Line Extension - Expanding access to public transit locally means Hennepin County residents will benefit from increased mobility and connectivity and decreased greenhouse gas emissions. Running from downtown Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park, this extension will provide transportation for tens of thousands of riders providing access to basic needs without dependence on a car. Moving forward, the Blue Line Extension will reduce the 35% of greenhouse gas emissions created by vehicles in Minneapolis.

Sustainable transportation (cont.)

Biking Locally – The American Cycling League estimates that from 2000 to 2016 cycling in America rose 47% largely due to growing awareness of the negative environmental impacts from gas-fueled vehicles. To accommodate all these bikes, cities have begun focusing on adding greenways for pedestrians and bikes to safely commute away from car, truck and bus traffic. These efforts support clean air initiatives in large urban areas where congestion and pollution are more concentrated. Currently, there are approximately 800 miles of bike lanes in Hennepin County and 2.5% of all trips within the county are made on a bike, which is more than double the national average! In fact, our [2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan](#) will add 20 miles of bike facilities each year and ensure that 90% of homes are within half a mile of a bikeway. With tons of used bikes looking for a good home in 2024, there's never been a better time to get biking and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions locally.

Anticipate continued growth in public transportation and biking infrastructures over the course of 2024 as cities move to address the environmental impacts of urban commuting and consumers drive the trend for more accessible biking.

2024 and Beyond

The sustainability trends shaping 2024 and beyond are not isolated innovations but rather interconnected threads that weave together, creating a more responsible and eco-friendly future. The journey towards sustainability is a collaborative effort with all members of society steering change with our consumer choices and daily routines. While going about the hustle and bustle of a new year, keep in mind that every sustainable change makes a difference. From using renewable energy, or buying secondhand, the journey toward sustainability is gaining momentum and will continue to enhance our lives and the environment for years to come.