

City Report: Rochester

Rochester and Münster

Rochester's sister city, Münster, is in the northern part of North Rhine-Westphalia and is the capital of the local government region, Münsterland. The city has a population of nearly 310,000 people, almost 20% of whom are students, and covers an area of about 302km. Münster is recognized as an outstanding place to learn, work, and live, and has received corresponding awards, including one for Europe's finest park (Aasee) in 2009, and Bicycle Capital of Germany, which has been re-awarded each year since 2009).

Münster is one of the most active cities in Germany regarding climate protection. It was named "Germany's Capital for Climate Protection" in 1997 and in 2006. In the future, the city of Münster seeks to continue being a leader through various initiatives, such as "Alliance for Climate Protection", which supports NRW technical exchange partner municipalities, businesses, institutions, associations, and nonprofits that pursue energy efficiency projects, and refurbishing existing buildings to be more energy efficient - a goal Rochester is also accomplishing with its achievement of being Minnesota's first city to be LEED Gold certified.

Rochester has other similarities with Münster. Like Münster, Rochester consistently receives recognition as a desirable place to live and has won awards for their climate and sustainability efforts, such as the 2021 Minnesota Climate Adaptation Awards and an honorable mention for the 2020 Mayors' Climate Protection Awards for this innovative community engagement approach.



Outside the Historisches Rathaus, looking at the spire of the Münster Cathedral (St. Pius Dom). The street was decorated as the finish line for a marathon.



Mayor Markus Lewe (L) and Mayor Kim Norton (R) exchange gifts in front of the fire place in the Historisches Rathaus.

Deutsche Perspektive

Mayor Markus Lewe

Q: Today we are in Münster, hearing about your climate ambitions and what is possible. Why is what you are doing here so exciting?

A: Because it will be an epic challenge for all the people in the world. We need a lot of connection, and we need international collaboration. It is so necessary and so beautiful that we get a frame of trust that we are able to go together into the future and to collaborate in a different way.

Q: The IPCC report indicates that we all need to be more ambitious and faster in achieving our climate goals. What is Münster doing to rise to this challenge that you are most excited about?

A: The politicians [here] decided that we would like to be climate neutral in 2030. That means we look to the biggest CO2 emissions and there are three steps. First, we have to change our energy producing. Second, we change our energy consumption. Third, is to organize alternatives to individual cars, especially for public transit, transit on demand in combination with bicycle traffic routes and traffic stations. The industrial revolution was the start of the beginning of new economical development, now I think we have the challenge to create a new economic power.

Without radical development of our administration and all of our courts and so on it will be impossible to change the situation so this is one of the most important things: to build fast, new train lines, wind plants, and photovoltaic and solar. There are a lot of challenges, but I think together we can better find a solution.

Q: What do you like about working with the Minnesotans?

A: I think the collaboration between Münster and Rochester began after the developments between Minnesota and NRW. So, this combination is very important and some months ago I was in a video conference, and I saw your projects and I saw different steps. And I thought to myself: wow, they are very strong and have a lot of achievement to reach the objectives, despite the news we often hear from the Federal United States, especially from the former President. And so, we were very surprised. I myself also thought 'wow' in a very good way to get solution against climate change.



Zentralfriedhof, a beautiful and historic cemetery in Münster where people walk and bike for pleasure.

Bikes, Bipartisanship, and Building Relationships

Rochester Mayor, Kim Norton, shares her thoughts on the relationship between Münster and Rochester



Mayor Kim Norton

Q: Today we are in the Münster City Hall and we are talking about climate adaptations for municipalities, cities, and government in general. What are you hearing today that is the most impressive to you? What really captures your imagination?

A: Three things. One, I was very excited to hear that the mayor of Münster, who is from the conservative German political party, has embraced climate change with more enthusiasm than he has in the past and is very excited about partnering with us. Second, hearing about the aggressive goals that they set for themselves and their explanation about how it is more expensive and harmful to future generations to do nothing, than it is to do nothing. Yes, it costs money, but the long-term costs of doing nothing are so much higher and greater. Third, hearing them talking about transportation and how you can link cities is exciting. Rather than talking about bike lanes as just for pleasure talking about them as highways for employees in Rochester who live in nearby small towns. If we could get the State to commit to say this is something they will prioritize at the State level we might be able to incentivize people to use bikes because they could get to work safer and faster on bike than perhaps they could on a crowded highway. And Rochester has committed to keeping our paths clear in winter, so that would be a question for the State too.

Q: What are you learning about aggressive climate goals and bipartisanship in Germany that you think could translate to Minnesota?

A: I wish our political parties could quit finding sustainability and climate protection as reasons too divide and start seeing them as

an issue we should all be uniting over. The rest of the world has agreed to this. But I think if people like Senator Senjem and others from his party to come to this issue, as we saw from the Bürgermeister Markus Lewe, we could make that change too. There is hope in the younger generation too, that people across parties will embrace this issue.

“We get people from all around the world who come to stay with us [in Rochester] who are pleasantly surprised we have so many clear paths for them to walk on.”

- Mayor Kim Norton

Q: What is valuable about being here in person and talking directly with your German partners? What would be lost if we couldn't be physically in Germany?

A: Building relationships. We got through the early part of the pandemic using online tools – and we will continue to do that because we need to talk more than once or twice a year – but you don't build as close a relationship online. So it is important to have both options. The friendships that we have made and the joy we have in seeing each other is really meaningful, and that wouldn't have happened if this partnership was simply online.