

A Community Advantage

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Many of us love the feel of walking down our local streets, into local businesses, running into people we know, and getting the warm personal welcome that is signature to most small towns. Municipal utility companies can be viewed as another example of a small town feel that allows local people to work together to meet the needs of their community no matter the size of the community they serve. This is a huge advantage for many reasons including decision making by local people, placing community need before profit, and providing quality services in a cost effective and reliable manner.

Alexandria Light and Power (ALP) is a municipal utility company that provides electric and city water services in my community of Alexandria, Minnesota. As ALP is governed by familiar local faces that live and work in the community, decisions are made that also affect the people making them. This is a distinct advantage because no one knows what communities need better than the people that live in that community. Providing excellent and cost-effective service becomes personal when it is being provided to the people decision makers come in contact with in their daily lives. This makes for intentional decision making because it is affecting their friends, neighbors, and family members. While serving local communities is the main focus, municipal utility companies also band together when needed. I was proud to read a story in our hometown newspaper, the Echo Press, that told the story of two ALP utility workers that traveled to Florida to help restore power to parts of Florida after the destruction of Hurricane Ian. This reveals ALP goes above and beyond not only in our community, but in other communities as well.

The not-for-profit structure municipal utilities operate under is another distinct community advantage. This is because it allows community needs to stay in the forefront of decision making and resource allocation. Privately owned companies are driven by the need to produce profit for shareholders which can certainly impact the company's motivation and therefore decisions. The commitment to putting community first in all decisions is evident in

ALP's mission statement of "going above and beyond to improve the communities we serve through excellence." When service is put before profit, communities win.

Cost effective and reliable service are also advantages of municipal utilities. According to the American Public Power Association, residential customers of public power utilities pay on average 4% less than customers of investor-owned utilities and 16% less than customers of cooperative utilities. Regarding reliability, outside of major events like a storm, public power customers are likely to be without power for less time - approximately 62 minutes per year as compared to 150 minutes per year for private utility customers (Stats and Facts).

In conclusion, municipal utility companies provide distinct advantages to the communities they serve. They provide a necessary service with the needs of the community in the forefront. Key principles of local decision making and a not-for-profit structure allow communities that have municipal utilities to get cost effective and reliable services from people that are equally invested in the community they live in. I, for one, am thankful to have a municipal utility like Alexandria Light and Power in my community.

Works Cited

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