Taking the reins
Stephen’s next generation comes home and assumes leadership roles

by Steve Downer

It’s the ‘changing of the guard’ at the City of Stephen—and the new leadership carries with it a promise of providing long-term stability.

Changes involve both policymakers and staff.

BreAnne Patterson is the new city clerk/treasurer. Patterson has been on the job for just more than a year, starting in December 2018. A 2004 graduate of Stephen-Angley High School and then Bemidji State University, she was formerly city clerk in Drayton, North Dakota (22 minutes to the northwest).

City government isn’t a career path Patterson planned on. She graduated from college with a degree in exercise science. The business and accounting classes she took at the time weren’t her favorites, but they came in handy when she was hired to replace the retiring Drayton city clerk.

Her husband is a Drayton native and when a position opened for him in Drayton, the move was made from Fargo, which ultimately led to her budding career in Stephen.

The city had been searching for the right person to fill the shoes of long-time clerk Roger Nelson, who retired in 2015, and Patterson was in the right place at the right time.

“I like the work,” she said. There are plenty of challenges, lots to learn (such as the various utility reporting requirements). She is never bored, she said. “The days go by so fast.”

She is thankful for the experience she gained in Drayton, where she learned how cities work and, among other things, fund accounting.

Patterson is working with many people whom she has known most of her life.

Mayor Brett Kuznia graduated from Stephen-Angley a year before Patterson. Councilmember Daniel Douglas and Pat-
terson were classmates. Coun-
cilmember Paige Halfmann is a contemporary and Drayton
native, while Patsey Heggen pro-
vides a long-term perspective

Stephen City Clerk BreAnne Patterson is a graduate of Stephen-Angley High School. She joins a number of her contemporaries who are now in municipal leadership roles.

“It’s a small town,” Patterson

(her daughter graduated

with Mayor Kuznia).

Stephen City Clerk BreAnne Patterson is a graduate of Stephen-Angley High School. She joins a number of her contemporaries who are now in municipal leadership roles.

Century of division ends as municipal serves entire city

After nearly a century where the community was divided between two electric utility service providers, Elk River Municipal Utilities (ERMU) has completed an initiative to provide unity in utility services to the City of Elk River through a multi-year electric service territory transfer agreement with Connexus—the neighboring cooperative electric utility.

The last administrative step was completed Jan. 23, when the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) accepted the joint request to update the official service territory map to reflect the agreed-upon transfer. The updated map will reflect the permanent transfer of certain areas located within the city limits of Elk River and formerly within the electric service territory assigned to the Coopera-

tive.

The physical ‘cutover’ of customers from the cooperative to the municipal was completed last fall.

ERMU and Connexus have a history of big-picture territory agreements. In 1991, ERMU entered into a 20-year orderly electric service territory transfer plan with Connexus—then known as Anoka Electric Cooperative—for a portion of what was previously the Township of Elk River.

In 2015, ERMU entered into another multi-year electric service territory transfer agreement with the cooperative, to serve the remaining customers within the City of Elk River. The final areas connected to the municipal electric distribution system last fall, in the far northwest and northeast corners of the city, include approximately 1,344 acres and 79 customers (73 residential and six small commercial).

The vision of past ERMU governance and staff to invest in electric service territory helped to build the foundation for a reliably robust and financially sound utility and ERMU continues to build upon that foundation,” said General Manager Troy Adam.

With the completion of the recent transfer, ERMU now serves nearly all electric cus-

Citizens of the City of Elk River will benefit from the growth of municipal electric and water service throughout the entire city.

ERS: see page 10 please

MPUC issues order on ‘DG’ standards

The Minnesota Public Utilities (MPUC) on Jan. 22 issued an order adopting Technical Interconnection and Interoperability Requirements (TIIR). The long-awaited order formalized a November 14 hearing decision. The requirements are part of the state’s new Distributed Energy Resources (DER) Interconnection Process template, for all electric utilities.

The MPUC order follows months of meetings by a ‘Technical Subgroup’ appointed to develop the technical and engineering aspects of the new process. The subgroup, which includes MMUA’s Bob Jagusch, will continue to work through a number of issues included in the recent MPUC order, including:

• Energy storage control modes, and harmonization of the language and structure of the energy storage requirements in the operating agreements.

MPUC: see next page please
licit treatment of distributed energy resources (DER) using Power Control Systems for maximum capacity and export control in the Minnesota Distributed Energy Resources Process (MN-DIP) and the TIIR documents;

• Evaluation of Voltage-Reactive Power Regulation in the TIR;

• Harmonization of the language and structure of voltage regulation considerations in the TIIR with the extent possible;

• Harmonization of the language and structure of the communications operating agreements so as to not unduly burden DER operators; and

• Plan to reduce and/or track unintended curtailments due to Voltage–Active Power Control Prior to implementation.

The MPUC established the full Distributed Generation (DG) Workgroup in January 2017, and set up a two-phase process to update the 2004 Interconnection Standards: 

• Phase I would update Minnesota’s DG interconnection process based on the federal Small Generation Interconnection Procedures (SGIP) and Agreement (SGIA) to become the MN DIP, from which the municipalities and cooperatives drafted their own process and agreement templates for adoption by individual utilities.

• Phase II would update the Minnesota DG Technical Interconnection and Interoperability Requirements (TIIR) and incorporate newly revised national technical standards. The process templates referred to above incorporated the TIIR in its entirety.

We’ve moved!

With our former offices slated for demolition to make way for re-development, MMUA has moved across the street to 3311 Fernbrook Lane N., Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447. All of our other contact info remains the same.

Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association

To unify, support and serve as a common voice for municipal utilities

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MMUA The Resource


2/February 2020 The Resource

State law defines ‘DG’ as an electric generating facility with a capacity of 20 megawatts or less that interconnects and operates in parallel with the electrical grid. The TIIR and TSMs are based on the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 1547 standard for DG interconnection and other applicable national standards. In April 2018, the Commission also requested input from the TSG as to when IEEE 1547-2018 certified equipment is ‘readily available.’

The DG Workgroup will continue to discuss interim implementation of the TIIR while the equipment-certification process is underway. The DG Workgroup will attempt to draft a document to accompany the TIIR that clarifies which provisions are in place in the interim period until newly certified equipment is available.

If no consensus is reached, each utility shall adopt their preferred version of the guidance document to be included with the utility’s TSM.

Statutory authority

In 2001, the Legislature enacted Minnesota Statute §216B.1611, requiring the MPUC to establish generic standards for DG interconnection and operation.

State law defines DG as an electric-generating facility with a capacity of 10 megawatts (MW) or less, that uses natural gas, renewable, or other “clean fuel,” and that interconnects and operates in parallel with a Minnesota utility’s distribution grid. The statute requires the MPUC to establish generic standards for tariffs governing the interconnection of DG.

2004 Interconnection Standards;

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by reference and need no changes to comply with state law. New MMUA templates for the filing of members’ annual Cogeneration and Small Power Production Tariffs include changes to incorporate the TIIR by reference as well.

The state’s rate-regulated electric utilities jointly submitted a draft TIIR as a starting point for discussion. The utilities proposed that each utility would have a companion Technical Specifications Manual (TSM) containing utility-specific requirements.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the Technical Subgroup (TSG) of the DG Workgroup (including Jagusch) met periodically to modify and update the TIIR. The TSG includes representatives of rate-regulated utilities, cooperatives, municipal utilities, and clean-energy advocacy groups.

Minnesota Technical Requirements

The Minnesota Technical Requirements applicable to interconnection of DER comprise both the TIIR and TSMs.

The TIIR includes technical requirements that apply across all utilities in Minnesota. Because of the differences amongst the utilities’ distribution systems, the TSMs allow for utility-specific requirements when needed.

TSMs also provide further detail in the absence of a common statewide or national industry standard.
has the time come to re-consider your municipal utility’s primary mission?

Editor’s note: The following first appeared in News > Blogs at www.mmua.org.

Municipal utilities have long sought to provide reliable service at a reasonable rate. At one time it may have been enough. It isn’t now. Simple numbers add up to trouble in many places. About 20 percent of Minnesota’s municipal electric utilities have fewer than 500 customers. A look at any city census numbers over the decades reveals a dismal fact of population decline.

Others have put their finger on the problem. Granite Falls Mayor and Utilities Commissioner Dave Smiglewski calls it “an alarming decline in civic and community engagement, particularly in rural areas.” This is especially notable, since Granite Falls is no slouch when it comes to operating a municipal electric utility. It is an MMUA member city and has operated a municipal electric utility since 1891. Its hydroelectric plant supplies approximately 30 percent of the city’s electrical needs in a good year. The utility also maintains and operates a fossil-fueled co-generating plant. It builds and maintains its own lines. The city operates the Kilowatt Community Center.

The city’s population is approximately 2,500—which makes it a typical Minnesota municipal electric city.

That a well-respected leader in a town, typically-sized municipal utility city is seeing the alarm is notable. The alarm being sounded by Smiglewski is often confirmed in conversations with city and utility people around the state.

From this, I submit that it is not enough to diligently attend to the utility’s business, seeking to make wise decisions to benefit it and its customers. A transition in leadership often leads to trouble for a utility. What happens when you go (and you surely will) and there is nobody prepared (or even willing) to take your place?

A person involved with MMUA once compared municipal utility leaders to offensive linemen: if they were never noticed—if their number never got called—then they were doing their job. There is, however, much work to be done in promoting Public Power in Minnesota.

Somebody has to do it.

And it starts with you.

A municipal utility’s first mission may be to simply replicate itself. I offer two thoughts to consider:

• Start with the United States Marine Corps. Anyone interested in a military career, vision, and values would find good study here. The United States Marines Corps spells dedication to its mission, vision and values in sweat and blood. Selfless devotion means nothing if the Marine Corps can’t make Marines. That is its first and most important mission. (Why do you think the Marine drill sergeant is an iconic figure?)

• Second (perhaps leaving philosophy to the philosophers) examine whether, and if so, the ‘great commission’ left to his disciples by Jesus of Nazareth: Go and make disciples. That is a clear mission. It was aimed squarely at perpetuating something that started, on the face of it, with 12 people.

While there is more to it, one of a local policymaker’s jobs should be to simply keep the organization going.

Steve Donner
Investor-owned utilities file annual reliability reports with state regulators

With the onset of renewable energy and adoption of various technologies, utility comparisons may not be quite as straightforward as they once were, but rates and reliability remain as hallmarks of utility service.


The reports are filed pursuant to state law. Municipal electric utilities are required to file similar reports with their local governing bodies. Utilities report normalized (adjusted to neutralize the effects of outages due to major storms) system average interruption duration index (SAIDI), System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI) and customer Average Interruption Duration Index (CAIDI) by work center and for the state. Utilities are required to use the IEER 1360 standard (also known as the 2.5 Beta method) for normalizing major event days. The utilities propose standards for each work center. The MPUC then sets reliability performance standards annually for the utilities.

Historically, the MPUC has directed utilities to use rolling five-year averages of SAIDI, SAIFI and CAIDI for each work center. However, standards have been ‘frozen’ at prior year’s levels if there has not been sufficient progress. Otter Tail’s standards have been frozen at 2013 levels.

Utilities are required to provide “an action plan for remedying any failure to comply with the standard” or “why non-compliance was unavoidable under the circumstances.”

Minnesota Power
MP did not meet any of its standards again in 2018. The company blamed weather and equipment failure as the main reasons. MP said it has

SAIDI, SAIFI, CAIDI: defined and formulas

- **SAIDI** means the System Average Interruption Duration Index and measures the average customer minutes of interruptions per customer. $\text{SAIDI} = \frac{\text{Total Customer Minutes of Sustained Outages} \times \text{Number of Customers}}{\text{Total Customer Minutes of Sustained Outages}}$

- **SAIFI** means the System Average Interruption Frequency Index and measures the average number of interruptions per customer per year. $\text{SAIFI} = \frac{\text{Total Number of Sustained Customer Interruptions}}{\text{Number of Customers}}$

- **CAIDI** means Customer Average Interruption Duration Index and is measured by the average customer minutes of interruption per customer interruption. $\text{CAIDI} = \frac{\text{Total Customer Minutes of Sustained Outages}}{\text{Total number of Sustained Customer Interruptions} \times \text{SAIDI}}$

- ** Interruption means an interruption of electricity service to a customer greater than five minutes in duration.**

- **Major Service Interruption** means an interruption of service at the feeder level or above and affecting 500 or more customers for one or more hours.

hired additional engineers in 2017 to implement a trouble order tracking and remediation system, which was implemented late in 2018. The engineers also began to audit MP’s system and develop an asset management program. The Department recommended leaving MP’s standards at 2016 levels for 2019. MPUC staff noted MP’s decreasing reliability compliance for SAIDI and SAIFI, with a decrease in CAIDI.

Otter Tail Power
Otter Tail proposed leaving its 2018 reliability standards at 2013 levels. Otter Tail has seen flat or slightly increasing reliability indices (poorer reliability) over the past 10 years, aside from the Minibank and Wahpeton work centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minnesota Power</th>
<th>SAIDI</th>
<th>SAIFI</th>
<th>CAIDI</th>
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<td>2018 Results (Normalized)</td>
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<td>2018 Results (Non-normal.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Proposed</td>
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Xcel Energy

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<th>Region</th>
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<td>307.95 122.04</td>
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CAIDI goals have stagnated since 2013, its overall metrics have remained high in comparison to Xcel and MP, and to other investor owned utilities nationally. Some proposed goals for Metro East and Northwest increased in 2019, making them easier to meet. Southeast work center trends indicate that, unlike other areas of the state, its reliability has worsened or remained stagnant over the past years. The Metro West region has seen the greatest improvements in all categories and is the only service region to see improvement in CAIDI. Xcel has renewed its request for a Fault Location, Isolation and Service Restoration (FLISR) system, a grid modernization initiative.

SAIDI and SAIFI have fluctuated, generally, while CAIDI goals have stagnated or crept slowly higher.

MPUC staff provided a framework to study Locational and Equity Reliability (by geography, income, or other relevant benchmarks). To date, the MPUC receives limited information on locational reliability and outages. Xcel reports on the 25 worst performing feeders per service region on an annual basis. Staff noted that “creating a metric to adequately gauge if reliability issues are tied to factors like location or customer income level is even more challenging.”

More with less?
MP reported 111 full time field worker positions, 96 of which are responsible for operation and maintenance of distribution systems. The company has seen a slow decline in the number of line workers over the past few years. Otter Tail has increased the number of line workers from approximately 116 in 2009 to more than 120 in 2018. Xcel added two positions since 2017, but still has lower total numbers than its historical average. The Southeast service center has lost 27 percent of its staff since 2009. This region also has the poorest service quality numbers.

The IOUs are required to benchmark their reports to IEEE standards.

Continued from facing page

which have very few feeders, leading to higher year to year fluctuation.

Otter Tail had one day qualify as a Major Event Day in 2019. Outages following a severe thunderstorm would have added over 20 minutes to its SAIDI if not excluded. Weather and equipment failures continued to its SAIDI if not excluded.

Xcel has maintained that level for 2019. The MPUC froze Xcel’s SAIDI and SAIFI goals for this work center at 2017 levels last year, and maintained that level for 2019.

Some proposed goals for Metro East and Northwest increased in 2019, making them easier to meet. Southeast work center trends indicate that, unlike other areas of the state, its reliability has worsened or remained stagnant over the past years. The Metro West region has seen the greatest improvements in all categories and is the only service region to see improvement in CAIDI.
East Grand Forks prepared as it can be for high water or economic challenges

by Steve Downer

As a slow-motion disaster potentially unfolds in the Red River Valley, the East Grand Forks Water & Light Department is as prepared as it can be.

American Crystal Sugar operates five district sugar beet processing plants in the Red River Valley, including one in East Grand Forks. The plant in East Grand Forks can be—at peak times—over half the Water & Light's electric load.

By all indications, operations at the plant will be sharply curtailed early this year.

Wet weather troubled the 2019 harvest from beginning to end. Fields too muddy to support equipment were covered by up to two feet of October snow. Temperatures dropped into the teens, freezing beets and rendering them unsuitable for processing.

While American Crystal Sugar has allowed some harvesting of frozen beets, processing is expected to end March 1. Processing in the company's five factory districts usually is completed in May or June. Because of the trucking of beets logistics, it was decided to shut the Hillsboro factory down in early February, which means the East Grand Forks factory will run a couple weeks longer.

The situation promises to cut heavily into electric sales, but with years of solid financial management, and only a thin margin on industrial sales, General Manager Keith Mykleseth expects the Water & Light Department to ride out the situation in good financial condition.

Perhaps harder to predict is what potential layoffs in the local labor force will mean longer-term to the utility and local economy.

Flood devastation led to preventative steps

The springtime Red River flood of 1997 occurred in Minnesota, North Dakota, and southern Manitoba and devastated communities, including East Grand Forks. Total damages for the Red River region were $3.5 billion.

Unprecedented mutual aid efforts, particularly on the water side, restored service weeks before it had been anticipated.

After the flood, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) worked with East Grand Forks to clear residential and business development from a large area of floodplain. A system of new dikes was built beyond this on both sides of the river. Floodplain along the river was redeveloped as the Greater Grand Forks Greenway.

There are some troubling indications. Farmer shareholders who had to leave beets in the field were required to pay back American Crystal Sugar $343 million.

MPUC approves Enbridge Line 3 on rehearing

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission Feb. 3, on a 3-1 vote, approved a revised environmental review, a certificate of need and a route permit for the Enbridge Line 3 replacement project.

The PUC approved the project in June 2018 but the Minnesota Court of Appeals last summer rejected an environmental impact study for the project.

The line would replace an aging crude oil pipeline and would be built along a different route. It would have the capacity to transport about twice as much oil as the current pipeline.

Enbridge now needs to secure permits from additional state and federal regulators. The company has said it hopes to begin work on the project this year.

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see facing page please
per acre for the unharvested acres, an unprecedented situation. The money will be used to cover the company’s fixed costs.

Approximately one-third of the crop was left in the fields, a spokesman said.

Along with beets, reports are that about half of the potatoes in the Minnesota and North Dakota growing area of the Red River Valley were left in the field.

Utility floodwall duties

With spring around the corner and a wet 2019, spring flooding is a real possibility. With a couple snowy months yet to come, predictions for this spring may be premature, but the Water & Light Department—which is responsible for storing and deploying sections of removable flood wall—is participating in pre-planning.

Among those involved in the planning is Distribution Superintendent Jeff Olson. He will start his 43rd year with the utility in June. He was 21 and working for a rural water cooperative, when a job opened in the city water department. From there, with an interest and some background in electronics, he soon moved to the electric line department.

Olson works closely with Mykleseth and others, including Todd Grabanski, the electric crew foreman.

Although somewhat weather dependent, Olson is looking for a very busy 2020. There is a backlog of projects from 2018, he said, and 2019 was so wet a lot of planned work never got started.

Among the projects that have been recently completed is the addition of a second transformer at the ‘Sugar Hills’ substation, located between Water & Light’s distribution services center and American Crystal Sugar. The electric crew did most of the electrical wiring work itself, skills that have been handed down over several generations of employees.
said with a little laugh, when talking about the relationships. But relationships are important, and often influence where people live.

“I never imagined I’d be back home,” she said. But “family is very important. It’s part of small-town life.”

The change in city leadership was not only welcome but necessary in Stephen. In 2012, nobody ran for mayor. Long-time councilmember David Clark had planned on retiring but was elected in a write-in vote. He served admirably, but was looking for somebody else to take their turn.

Now, another generation is willingly taking the city’s reins. That bodes well for the future.

Small but productive

The City of Stephen is small, but it does a lot. The city provides electricity, natural gas, water and wastewater utility services, to approximately 350 residential, commercial and industrial customers, mostly within the city limits. The city also provides recycling and garbage service.

In addition, it operates a golf course, campground and pool. The community also boasts a curling club and various attractions.

Some funds have been a challenge financially, but steps have been taken to put each on a sound footing.

Stephen has purchased water from North Kittson Rural Water since 1993, and distributes it locally. Water rates have been increased to match the North Kittson rate. Garbage rates have also been increased to break even.

The city is a member of the Northern Municipal Power Agency. It buys electricity at wholesale from the agency and distributes it locally.

The municipal natural gas system was established in the 1960s. Like many other municipal gas utilities in northwestern Minnesota, Stephen works with Constellation Energy, a subsidiary of Exelon, on gas purchase and transportation issues. The city recently locked in gas prices through 2025.

Natural gas and electric service are a financial stabilizer and those rates were left unchanged for 2020.

Like most municipal operations, it’s a team effort.

City’s electric utility still vibrant entering 120th year

Stephen is located in the Red River valley, 40 miles south of the Canadian border, 15 miles east of North Dakota and about 46 miles from Grand Forks. Population hit a high of 904 in 1970, and was estimated at 662 in 2013.

The City of Stephen’s electric utility began on June 22, 1900, when the village voted to build an electric plant and water pumping station. The power plant provided water pressure for firefighting. The brick building also included a jail cell. The electric plant was in operation by mid-December 1900. It remains next to the ground storage water tank and water tower. The historic building houses control panels and is used for various purposes.

The city was founded in 1878 along the Great Northern Railway tracks, on the north side of the winding Tamarac River (the settlement was originally called Tamarack). The city was named after George Stephen, one of the founders of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Stephen’s school district consolidated with Angyle in 1996.

Among the local industries is Terex Manufacturing, producer of Black Ace Parts and D&D Commodities, producer of premium foods and treats for wild birds and other wildlife.

The Stephen Area Endowment Fund (SAEF) was recently formed to meet individual, organization, and enhance the community. SAEF operates as a component fund of the Northwest Minnesota Foundation (NMF).
Solar LLC installation goes forward with RPU
The impact to RPU customers (RPU) board, which calls for BPU to buy the energy from a 10 megawatt panel solar array and sell the energy generated to BPU for an estimated $1.3 million in 2020. One change for 2020 is the city and MMU will no longer have shared information technology (IT) services. That move followed an IT consultant’s regular report. Reasons for the change include the growing complexity and different needs of the two entities.

Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU), American Electric Power (AEP) and the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport are partnering to build a roughly 40-acre, 5-megawatt solar array at the airport. The development is expected to generate about 10 million kilowatt hours annually.

Brainerd Solar LLC, a subsidiary of AEP, will build and own the 16,000-18,000 panel solar array and sell the energy generated to BPU for its use. BPU customers will have the option to buy in to the project, though the cost has yet to be determined.

The solar plant is to be constructed northwest of the runway at the airport. After eight years, BPU may buy the system. Combined with its Mississippi River hydroelectric plant, approximately 15-20 percent of BPU’s future electric sales will be locally-generated renewable energy.

The Rochester City Council Dec. 2 approved an agreement forwarded from the Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) board, which calls for RPU to buy the energy output from a 10 megawatt (MW) solar farm to be built locally. The impact to RPU customers once the Rochester Solar LLC installation goes commercial in late 2021 would be approximately $0.47 per month, for an average residential customer.

The Minnesota River Public Utilities Commission has dissolved. The Henderson and Le Sueur city councils have both approved the dissolution. The commission was formed in 2005 to oversee operation of a wastewater treatment facility that serves both cities.

Henderson is now a customer of the City of Le Sueur, with the term of the agreement running 20 years.

Bloomington Public Utilities is moving ahead with a process to replace its Main Street water tower. The issue has been discussed for five years, public input is being sought, and the utility hopes to have a design selected later this year.

A number of components of the existing tower, which is nearly a century old, are no longer in compliance with state and federal regulations. Refurbishing the existing 65,000 gallon tank would cost an estimated $650,000, with the cost of a new 100,000 gallon tank estimated at $800,000.


Jill Wolf is the new Adrian city administrator and clerk-treasurer. Mike Hardin is the new director of public works at the City of Sleepy Eye. He replaces Rob Elston, who left the position to become city manager.

Bill Schwandt has resigned as general manager of Moorhead Public Service. The long-time general manager had been with the utility since 1993.

Willmar Municipal Utilities Commission recently presented Ridgewater College a $10,000 rebate for installing a new energy-efficient chiller for its air-conditioning system at its Willmar campus. The Commission used the occasion to also talk about its upcoming rebates for electric vehicle chargers.

Electric and water bills will slightly increase for Owatonna residents in 2020, Owatonna Public Utilities (OPU) announced Dec. 12, at its annual State of the Utility community meeting. The event brought local business and government leaders to learn more about OPU’s rates and programs. The rates will include a less than 1 percent hike for electric bills after a 3 percent decrease in 2019. The adjustment reflects an OPU cost-of-service study. Monthly water rates will go up about 5 percent. There will be no change in natural gas rates, but an increase in purchased gas costs is expected.

The Biwabik Public Utilities Commission this fall voted to increase water charges $2 per month, to $31.50. Half of that increase will go to fund water treatment system upgrades and half to debt service. Wastewater charges were also raised $2, to $27.36, for similar reasons.

Street light and storm sewer charges were both raised $1 per month. The city council, as directed by the city charter, held a January public hearing on the rate increases but took no action, as allowed by the charter, since the PUC had already approved the rates.

The Elk River Municipal Utilities Commission has chosen to keep electric rates unchanged for 2020. In 2019, ERMU reduced rates 5 percent. ER MU credited competitive wholesale power pricing and conscientiously reducing expenditures, while maintaining responsible operation margins, for its ability to maintain steady rates.
Customers within the city limits. All told, approximately 2,000 customers were transferred from Connexus to ERMU from 2015-2019. There are approximately 12 cooperative members remaining within the city’s corporate limits which were excluded from the transfer due to other considerations.

The deal between Ramsey-based Connexus and ERMU marks one of the largest customer transfers where both utilities remain in business in Minnesota since electric service areas were established in Minnesota in 1974. Prior to the transfer, the utilities engaged in extensive technical discussions, spanning multiple years, to minimize any disruption to customers, to avoid unnecessary duplication of facilities, and to ensure a smooth transition of electric service.

According to Adams, this latest service territory transfer agreement was reached through extensive ‘values-based’ negotiations with intent for the utilities to maintain their excellent working relationship.

Significant effort was made through the conscious decisions and mindful division of the affected territory into areas to lower reintegration costs, through the timely sharing of system and meter data to allow for thorough planning, through the coordination and scheduling of the transfers to minimize outage time associated with the cutovers, and through the addition of emergency tie-points between the systems to provide additional mutual benefit to both utilities.

“We were intentional in providing value to both utilities while minimizing costs,” said Adams. The utilities mutually determined the optimal transition dates of September 9-17, 2019 and arranged the transfer of service. The transfer occurred safely, efficiently, and without technical difficulties. The utilities communicated extensively with the affected customers throughout the transition process. In addition, ERMU reached out to each affected commercial customers and met with customers as desired to assure understanding of rates and programs, and to answer any questions.

ERMU and Connexus have been working on this electric service territory transfer for over seven years.

Elk River residents will receive hometown electric and water service from the locally-based employees of Elk River Municipal Utilities, pictured here in 2019.
As the city of Elk River expands urban services, Elk River Municipal Utilities, with the support of the city, believes it makes sense to provide similar services to all customers within the city. ERMU has a vision to grow with the City of Elk River.

“The municipal electric utility is owned by our community. It stands to reason that our community should be able to receive services from the utility they own,” said ERMU General Manager Troy Adams. He noted that ERMU had several reasons for working to serve all electric customers within the city limits. They include:

• All residents and businesses benefit from having electricity provided by ERMU because a percentage of revenue goes to the city as a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT). The territory transfer has resulted in a larger PILOT payment to the city which will further offset expenses that would otherwise be funded through taxes or fees.

• ERMU is governed by a commission of local customers who are appointed by the City Council; therefore the utility is directed by those it serves.

• The openness and transparency of the municipal public power business model allows customers to be informed on the utilities’ operations and planning. The open meeting law allows for the public to witness the municipal utilities’ governance first-hand. The customers, community leaders, and elected officials provide feedback and direction for utilities that they own. ERMU provides local control and local accountability.

• One of the greatest advantages of municipal public power is the ability for collaboration, cooperation, and partnership with the city when working towards common goals. A city and its municipal utilities can be mutually successful through growth.

• Generally speaking, money paid to ERMU stays in the community. Law preserved right to grow

Municipal electric utilities have always had the right to serve throughout their city limits. City franchise authority originally conferred this right. When investor-owned utilities (IOUs), cooperatives and municipals agreed to service territory legislation as adopted by the Legislature in 1974, this long-standing right and practice was preserved.

While each segment of the industry had its reasons for seeking service territories, municipal utilities insisted that they continue to be allowed to grow with the cities they serve. Other segments of the utility industry agreed to this municipal demand, and the territory statutes were enacted.

MPUC approves North Branch-ECE request

The Elk River agreement wasn’t the only one of the MPUC addressed Jan. 23—it also accepted a joint request of North Branch Water and Light Commission of the City of North Branch and East Central Energy to update electric service territory records. The municipal and cooperative asked the MPUC to update the official service territory map to reflect an agreed-upon change in the utilities’ electric service territory boundaries. The joint request concerned the permanent transfer of an area located within the city limits of the City of North Branch and within the electric service territory assigned to the Cooperative.

The transfer area, which is known as Luftch’s Crossing Third Addition, involves approximately 32.02 acres and no current customers.
Xcel Energy reported 2019 fourth-quarter profits rose 35 percent, as the company’s stock hit an all-time high Jan. 20 of $68.76.

Rate increases necessary to pay for capital improvements were the key earnings driver for the year.

Meanwhile, according to recent reports, Xcel expects to have more than 11 gigawatts of wind on its system by 2021, which it said would be the most of any electric utility in the western hemisphere.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Jan. 16 approved Xcel Energy’s $650 million purchase of Southern Power’s natural gas power plant in Mankato. Rebuffed in September, Xcel restructured the deal so that the company’s shareholders will bear the risk of the purchase. The PUC previously opposed Xcel’s plan, and the state’s attorney general office still does, saying ratepayers could be on the hook for later costs associated with the facility. Xcel has been buying the facility, state and local levels. The agency noted that some state regulations and carbon emissions goals might be “ambitious” and “aspirational” and that when these goals and current technologies are mismatched, utilities are likely to be saddled with the resulting economic burden. The report calls out storage technology as needing significant innovation to match such goals, and notes that current prices make the economics of battery storage “questionable.”

According to a report from Edmunds, sales of plug-in electric vehicles in the United States were down 6.8 percent from 2018: from 349,000 to 325,000.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) Jan. 14 issued its January edition of the Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO), which included the first energy forecasts for 2021. The outlook forecasts that the United States will remain a net exporter of natural gas prices all help public power’s financial health. Factors negatively affecting the agency’s outlook included disruptions from technology and extreme weather events (such as wildfires). Utilities also face significant challenges in determining economic viabilities amid changing environmental regulations at the federal, economic growth, and low natural gas prices. The Florida Supreme Court ruled.

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The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission Dec. 5 approved a 5.8 percent interim rate increase for CenterPoint Energy Natural gas customers. The PUC continues to analyze the company’s initial request for a 6.8 percent rate increase.

The attorneys general of 15 states said in mid-January that they oppose a Trump administration proposal to allow rail shipments of liquefied natural gas, arguing the trains will share tracks with passenger trains and travel through congested areas.

The other objecting states were California, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia.

Florida court blocks electric competition ballot measure

The Florida Supreme Court on Jan. 9 blocked a ballot measure that would have opened the state’s electric power market to competition.

“The ballot summary tells voters that the proposed amendment grants a personal right to ‘sell electricity,’” when in fact the amendment does no such thing,” the court ruled.

The proposed constitutional amendment would have granted several rights, including the right to choose an electricity provider, the right to purchase electricity in competitive wholesale and retail markets, and the right to generate electricity oneself or in combination with others.

The court found that “at no point does the Initiative grant a freestanding constitutional right to sell electricity,” despite its claim that it did nothing to “limit the right of electricity consumers to buy, sell, trade, or dispose of electricity.”

The ‘Citizens for Energy Choices’ proposal would have compelled electric rate increases beginning Jan. 1, 2023. The group, whose supporters include Infinite Energy, NRG Energy, and Vistra Energy, faced a Feb 1 deadline to submit 766,200 signatures to be able to include the measure on the ballot in November. The group collected about 642,300 signatures.
The City of Truman received a grant from wholesale power supplier Heartland Consumers Power District (HCPS) at their council meeting Jan. 6 to help with costs related to the new Dollar General recently constructed in town.

Heartland Customer Relations Manager Kelly Dybdahl presented the $5,000 grant to the council.

The grant will be used to assist with costs related to installing necessary electrical infrastructure for the store recently built along Highway 15.

Heartland provides wholesale power to the city of Truman as well as other municipal utilities and state agencies in the Midwest. Heartland provides economic development grants to customers to help fund projects that spark growth and development, including supporting new business opportunities.

“A new retail establishment is an exciting benefit to any rural community,” said Heartland Director of Economic Development and Governmental Affairs Casey Crabtree. “Heartland was proud to partner with Truman to help prepare the necessary infrastructure to help Dollar General get established in town and we look forward to partnering on more opportunities in the future.”

The Minnesota Court of Appeals Dec. 23 ruled that the state’s Public Utilities Commission must consider the environmental impacts of a power plant proposed to be built in Wisconsin.

The ruling delays a plan by Dairyland Power Cooperative and a Minnesota Power (MP) affiliate to build a $730 million, 550-megawatt, natural gas-fired power plant in Superior, Wis.

The PUC in October 2018 approved MP’s plan to build, run and buy about half the capacity of the Nemadji Trail Energy Center power plant through agreements with an affiliated company, South Shore Energy.

The PUC rejected a petition to prepare an “environmental assessment worksheet” for the project because it did not have jurisdiction to order an environmental review for a project outside the state. The Court ordered the PUC to determine whether the power plant might have significant environmental effects and, if so, to prepare an environmental assessment.

The Court said the Minnesota Legislature didn’t limit the PUC’s jurisdiction to state boundaries. The Court also said the PUC has authority to approve or reject Minnesota Power’s agreements with its Wisconsin affiliate because affiliated-interest agreements fall under the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act.

The Court dismissed arguments that the company would violate the U.S. Constitution’s Commerce Clause, which bars state laws that expressly limit interstate trade. In 2016, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down a Minnesota statute called the Next Generation Energy Act that barred agreements to import or buy power from a source outside the state that would contribute to or increase statewide power-sector carbon dioxide emissions, because the law violated the commerce clause.

Parties to that litigation included the state of North Dakota, the Industrial Commission of North Dakota, the Lignite Energy Council, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, the North American Coal Corp., Great Northern Properties Limited Partnership, Missouri River Energy Services and Minnkota Power Cooperative.

Wisconsin regulators Jan. 16 authorized construction of the Nemadji Trail Energy Center power plant in Superior, despite concerns over the project’s environmental impact.

The Public Service Commission voted 2-1 to approve for Dairyland Power Cooperative of La Crosse, Wis., to proceed with the plant, which is to be jointly owned by Duluth-based Minnesota Power.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals on Feb. 13 ruled that the state’s Public Utilities Commission must consider the environmental impacts of a new power plant proposed to be built in Wisconsin. The Court said the Minnesota Legislature didn’t limit the PUC’s jurisdiction to state boundaries.

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North Dakota pipeline and gas plant to reduce ‘flaring’ of natural gas

ONEOK’s Elk Creek Pipeline and Demicks Lake Gas Plant are in operation in the Bakken region of North Dakota. The infrastructure is expected to be a critical component in reducing the amount of natural gas ‘flaring’ in the state. As much as 29 percent of gas produced in the area was flared in 2017, according to state regulators.

North Dakota flared 284 million cubic feet of gas in total in December, according to media reports, or 13 percent of produced natural gas.

Demicks Lake has a total design capacity for 400 million cubic feet per day.

The company owns several other natural gas processing facilities in the Bakken.

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**APPRA: continued from page 3**

public power utilities.

Similar issues are present-
ed in the Association’s pend-
ing appeal of FERC’s storage rule, Order No. 841. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Dis-

**PURPA reform**

The Association will also keep a close watch on FERC’s pending rulemak-
ing proposing changes to its Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 (PURPA) implementation regulations. In early December, the Association and the Large Public Power Council filed comments in the proceeding in which they said that the development of competi-
tive power markets and the dramatic growth of a renew-
able power sector now largely independent of the boost once provided by PURPA justify significant changes in PURPA regulations.

**Western markets**

The Association will also continue to track develop-
ments in the Western energy markets.

With respect to the Cali-

**Reliability**

The Association is keeping an eye on developments at the North American Elec-

In 2018 FERC issued Order No. 850 putting in place critical infrastructure protection reliability stan-

The order included that NERC re-

APPA: continued from page 3

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14/February 2020 The Resource
National legislative priorities set as APPA Rally nears

The American Public Power Association has set its legislative priorities for the year. These include:

- Public power’s efforts to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions to address climate change;
- Pushing for legislation that would provide public power utilities with comparable incentives to various energy-related tax credits they cannot take advantage of due to their tax-exempt status;
- Maintaining and enhancing tax-exempt financing for public power utilities’ electric infrastructure investments;
- Protecting the ability of the Tennessee Valley Authority and Power Marketing Administrations to continue to fulfill their historic mission of providing affordable electricity to the 50 million customers they jointly serve;
- Preserving public power’s exemption to regulate attachments to its poles at the local level;
- Supporting legislation to promote energy storage technologies; and
- Supporting policies that promote the electrification of vehicles and ensuring public power’s ability to deploy charging infrastructure in their communities.

These and other key federal policy issues that will be discussed at the Association’s Legislative Rally, which will take place from Feb 24-26 in Washington, D.C.

As this edition of the newsletter went to press, MMUA was busy adopting the national priorities to a statewide audience, and marshalling Public Power in Minnesota for the trip to the nation’s capital.

Associate Member News

CitiRep / Saginaw Control & Engineering has joined MMUA as an Associate Member. The company is a manufacturers representative company serving the electrical market in the Upper Midwest. The company is located at 6440 Flying Cloud Drive, Suite 223, Eden Prairie, MN 55344. Phone is 612.518.8453 and the website is located at www.saginawcontrol.com. Jeff Elstad, Regional Manager, is the main contact.
Upcoming Events

We are entering the busiest season for MMUA schools and workshops. Our upcoming slate of meeting and training opportunities includes:

**Emergency Preparedness & Restoration Conference**  
February 19-20

**Rodeo Clinic**  
February 26-27

**PCB Management & Recordkeeping Workshop**  
March 17-18

Sign-up closes on Feb. 18 for this in-demand workshop, so act today!

**Substation School**  
March 24-26

This school is popular enough to keep on our annual calendar. If you are not registered, hurry! Registration fee increases Feb. 18 and closes Feb. 28.

**Legislative Conference**  
March 31 - April 1  
St. Paul

2020 promises to be a very active session for municipal utilities. Click on this event at the Calendar > Events page on our website for the latest program details!

**Generation School**  
April 21-23

Generation School offers participants valuable classroom and hands-on instruction plus networking opportunities for generator operators and technicians. Whether a seasoned operator or just starting out in the field, all can benefit. This year we will offer in-plant, hands-on instruction on three different engine sets: Enterprise, Cooper and Fairbanks Morse. Plus we’ll tour one of Hutchinson Utilities’ generation plants and 3M’s manufacturing plant in Hutchinson.

School headquarters will be in Hutchinson, with hands-on training in the Glencoe and Delano municipal power plants.

Registration fee increases March 20 and sign-up deadline is March 30.

**Underground School**  
May 12-15  
MMUA Training Center, Marshall

MMUA offers this school in partnership with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) and American Public Power Association (APPA).

The Underground School offers a hands-on training track with a variety of training sessions and an advanced technical course. In addition to top-notch instructors, we strive to keep class sizes small to maximize participation and learning. Whether you are a seasoned Journeyman looking to stay current or an Apprentice just starting out, this school offers something for everyone.

Individuals registered for the Multi-Session Class will rotate through six different training sessions, covering a variety of topics that can enhance safety and improve efficiency.

**Minnesota Public Power Fishing Tournament**  
Saturday, May 30  
Rush Lake, Ottertail

Mark your calendars now for this popular event for a good cause! Two-person teams per boat compete for prizes and bragging rights! Proceeds go to lineworker training programs in Minnesota. Registration will open in early March.

**Annual Summer Conference**  
August 24-26  
Cragun’s Resort

Yes, we know it’s early, but check your calendars. This conference has been moved back one week from its original date!

For more information, see the ‘Events’ calendar at www.mmua.org

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**Well-known instructor John Miner led the Line Design Workshop.**

**MMUA holds sold-out workshop on electric distribution line design**

Well, that was a popular one. MMUA held a sold-out workshop on Overhead and Underground Line Design, Jan. 21-22 at the Plymouth Comfort Inn. The workshop was originally set for the MMUA office, but the location was switched as the MMUA offices were in the process of being moved at the time.

The importance of line design was apparent in the response to the program—the first time in recent memory that MMUA has devoted an entire workshop to this topic.

Instructor John Miner offered a thorough overview of electrical distribution theory and its application to overhead and underground distribution systems. Participants gained a better understanding of customer load estimates and decisions about the sizing and location of service transformers, cable and conductors. Additional understanding was gained of distribution component designs and the purposes and practices of voltage regulation, grounding, lightning protection and maintenance.

Miner is a registered professional engineer and an accomplished executive manager and educator with over 45 years of experience in the electric utility industry. He is a frequent presenter at MMUA workshops and was formerly General Manager of Rochester Public Utilities and Chief Operating Officer for the Austin, Texas, Electric Utility Dept. He has been a course instructor for APPA for 30 years.

Miner is a senior life member of the IEEE and past chair of the IEEE Committee on Technology Accreditation Activities.

Given the strong support for and positive reviews of this workshop, MMUA is already planning a follow-up workshop for 2021.

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