RPU charts renewable energy future
Local control flourishes with wholesale power supply contract ending in 2030

by Steve Downer

Minnesota’s four first-class cities — Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester and Duluth — have all signed a climate change pledge. But only Rochester owns and operates its own electric utility.

And that local control is proving to be a positive factor in helping the community move to a more ‘sustainable’ energy future.

Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) has served the city for more than a century. It provides electric and water service to the city of approximately 115,000 residents. RPU has approximately 55,000 electric customers, including the world-famous Mayo Clinic, which it serves with electricity, water and steam.

Planning to meet the community’s energy needs has always been a part of what RPU does. That strategy has varied over the decades, and the utility now finds itself in a unique situation: RPU’s power supply contract with the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) expires in 2030, leaving it free to pursue self-determination for supplying electricity in a manner that meets state and, perhaps more importantly, community goals.

Its most recent round of planning can be traced to the RPU Infrastructure Study, started in 2005 to analyze power supply needs from 2016 through 2035. The Study has been updated several times. In 2015, the RPU board voted to eliminate coal from the utility’s portfolio by 2030, while meeting all renewable standards.

RPU wasn’t operating in a vacuum.

In 2005, then-Mayor Ardell Brede signed Rochester onto the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which set greenhouse gas emissions level goals, and addressed land use plans, long range transportation policies, and public works practices. It also committed Rochester to increase the use of renewable energy and make energy efficiency a priority.

In 2009, a city ordinance established the Rochester Energy Commission (REC), which was tasked with establishing an energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) ‘baseline inventory,’ and develop plans to reduce energy use as well as GHG emissions.

RPU is governed by a citizen board, appointed by the mayor and council, much like the REC. While the REC looks more directly at issues like transportation, building efficiency and municipal operations, the REC’s charter directs the Commission to “seek effective collaborative partnerships” with public and private institutions “to create a sustainable energy future.”

That pretty clearly pointed to RPU, which shares certain priority items with the REC, including shifting away from fossil fuels towards renewable resources, optimization of community power generation, and efficiency.

In 2015, Mayor Brede signed a proclamation directing that Rochester apply for funding to develop a comprehensive energy plan including the electric, transportation, and heating/cooling sectors, to achieve a goal of 100% renewable energy by 2050.

Elston moves from public works director to city manager
by Steve Downer

When he was named Sleepy Eye’s first public works director in 2004, Bob Elston knew he was expected to lead the effort to combine city and public utilities efforts. Little did he know, however, where that would eventually lead.

After years of superintending utilities, Elston officially assumed the city manager’s duties Aug. 28.

Elston’s move into city hall marks another logical step stemming from the close working relationship between the city and Sleepy Eye Public Utilities. The close working relationship between the two entities didn’t occur overnight. It was discussed for decades. Steps were taken as circumstances allowed. Nothing was forced.

Bob Weiss was part of those discussions. He has served on the Sleepy Eye Public Utilities Commission for approximately 28 years, most of them as commission president.

Elston’s move to city manager was not a surprise. The seeds for a closer working relationship between the city and PUC started decades ago, with the local charter commission. Weiss was a member of the charter commission. While the voters approved a recommended charter change to allow for the creation of a city manager’s position, the working relationship between the city and the local public utilities was discussed.

“We talked about, in the future, to try and be more efficient,” Weiss recalled.

No decisions were made, however, at that time.

As time went on, retirement dates approached for both the utility and street superintendents. The topic of a Public Works Director came up again. Because people on the city council and
need for flexibility to address the varieties of DER interconnections and DER types. The DER Interconnection Process recently adopted by each municipal electric utility incorporates the TIIR by generic reference to “Minnesota’s technical requirements,” replacing the previous technical requirements (Attachment 2 under the old interconnection standards).

The working group, including MMUA Engineering and Policy Analysis Director Bob Jagusch, met for over a year, including webinars and in-person meetings and weekly meetings of a subgroup (including Dakota Electric Association, Fresh Energy, IREC, MREA and Xcel) that wrote the proposed standard. The subgroup’s proposed document is designed to allow utilities to start using updated Technical Interconnection standards, including the TIIR and utility-specific Technical Standards Manuals.

The TIIR document is designed to conform with the new IEEE 1547-2018 national standard, despite the fact that the IEEE 1547.1 and standards supporting it are not yet complete. Inverters and other DER interconnection equipment have not yet been certified to this new standard. This is a concern in adopting the new standard. However, it was generally thought that waiting for certified equipment before adopting the standard would force state-regulated utilities to follow an outdated standard and not allow adoption of new technology.

The proposal states that until UL 1741 certified equipment that meets IEEE 1547-2018 is readily available, that functionality shall not be required by the utility, unless by mutual agreement.

Utility representatives noted that they benefit by having common requirements and standards. However, with new smart inverter technology and energy storage applications, developing utility specific TSM documents will take time. Utilities may need to modify these documents as they learn how to apply new technologies. Flexibility in this regard was deemed beneficial, by most commenters, and would most likely not be used as a means of imposing excessive requirements on applicants.

Rather than regulating TSMs, utilities recommended focusing on the TIIR document, which would be common across the regulated utilities. Updates could be examined on a regular basis.

The TIIR addresses what should be in a utility’s TSM. It is expected that these documents will be updated from time to time.

The environmental organizations said the TIIR should be adopted largely as submitted, but argued for the establishment of a clear process for updating TSMs and “aligning individual utility requirements.” They also argued that energy storage systems are likely to be an important part of Minnesota’s energy system and more needs to be done to address process and technical requirements for the TIIR.

In comments to the MPUC, Xcel suggested minor changes.

Minnesota Power said it was “fully supportive” of the proposal.

The Minnesota Rural Electric Association also put its support in writing. No date has been set yet for MPUC consideration of the proposal.

Xcel asks regulators to review ‘value of solar’ rate

With its “value of solar” rate calculated to double to more than 25 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) next year, Xcel Energy has asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to review the rate, which the company said in a regulatory filing is “unreasonable, unrepresentative and clearly falls outside of the public interest.” The rate spike was blamed on how the state figures avoided distribution capacity costs.

Published reports noted that the average residential customer pays $39 annually to support the program, and the program supplies 2 percent of the state’s energy.

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FERC proposes to modernize PURPA regulations, with support from utilities

from the American Public Power Association

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NOPR), regarding the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 (PURPA), proposes changes to ensure that PURPA’s rules and regulations continue to promote competition and encourage development of efficient and alternative energy technologies, while ensuring that utilities can meet their cost-of-service obligations.

The NOPR constitutes the Commission’s first comprehensive review of its PURPA regulations since 1980. Among other provisions, PURPA requires electric utilities (including public power utilities) to purchase power from certain cogeneration facilities and small power producers that are “qualified facilities” or “QFs” under the statute. The rates for these purchases are not supposed to exceed the cost that the utility would have incurred for the power if obtained from another source. The NOPR refers to as “avoided cost.” State commissions generally have authority to determine these avoided costs, although public power utilities and electric cooperatives that do not have state-regulated rates can usually set their own avoided cost rates for QP purchases.

FERC said that the proposed changes are intended to continue encouraging development of QFs while addressing concerns regarding how the current regulations work in today’s competitive wholesale power markets. PURPA was intended to reduce the country’s dependence on fossil fuels, which were thought to be in short supply at the time, by providing incentives to encourage the development of QFs.

What the NOPR proposes

The NOPR proposes to:

- Grant state regulatory authorities the flexibility to require that energy rates (but not capacity rates) in QP power sales contracts and other legally enforceable obligations vary in accordance with changes in the purchasing utility’s avoided costs at the time the energy is delivered;
- Grant states the flexibility to set “as available” QP energy rates based on market factors or, at the state’s discretion, to continue setting QP rates under the existing PURPA regulations;
- Replace the “one-mile rule” currently used for determining whether generation facilities should be considered to be part of a single facility for purposes of applying PURPA’s 80 megawatt limit for small power production QFs. The NOPR proposes a tiered approach under which facilities one mile or less apart would be treated as the same facility, facilities more than one mile but less than 10 miles apart would be presumed to be different facilities, which could be rebutted, and facilities 10 or more miles apart would be treated as separate facilities;
- Revise the Commission’s regulations implementing PURPA section 210(m) to reduce the rebuttable presumption threshold for small power production facilities (but not cogeneration facilities) from 20 MW to 1 MW. The NOPR’s proposed change recognizes that competitive markets have matured since the Commission first implemented section 210(m) of PURPA and the mechanics of participation in such markets are improved and better understood. For cogeneration facilities, the 20 MW presumption would remain;
- Clarify that a QF is entitled to a contract or legally enforceable obligation when it is able to demonstrate commercial viability and financial commitment to construct its facility pursuant to objective and reasonable criteria determined by the state; and
- Allow a party to protest a self-certification or self-recertification of a QF without being required to file a separate petition for declaratory order and to pay the associated filing fee.

Reforming the Commission’s PURPA regulations has been one of my top priorities since joining the Commission,” FERC Chairman Neil Chatterjee said. “Today, we have ample supplies of domestic natural gas and oil by promoting more efficient and alternative energy technologies,” Chatterjee went on to say. “Today, we have ample supplies of domestic natural gas and the prices of renewable energy technologies continue to fall,” he said.

The FERC Chairman noted that he has been clear that he wants to reform FERC’s regulations “in a way that not only meets our statutory obligations to encourage QF development, but also protects consumers and preserves competition.” At a later point, Chatterjee noted that the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners previously proposed that FERC clarify how a state could conduct a competitive solicitation to satisfy PURPA Section 210(m)(1)(C) standard for termination of a utility’s obligation to purchase from a QF. The NARUC paper argued that FERC should expand its interpretation regarding the kinds of markets that would justify relief from PURPA’s must-purchase obligation. Commissioner Richard Glick, who has been a proponent of revisiting PURPA’s implementation, noted in the NOPR that “I’m partially dissenting in large part because I think a significant number of proposals in the NOPR are not necessarily permitted under the statute. I think they really represent an attempt to administratively gut the statute,” Glick said at the opening meeting.

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The Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety (MnOPS) has proposed seven changes, plus a new definition, to Minnesota Statute 216C, the state’s One-Call utility locating law.

Other proposed changes include:
- Requiring the notification center to collect utility damage reporting and provide operator performance metrics.
- Requiring notification be made by an excavator 72 hours prior to excavation instead of the current 48 hours.
- Prior to the excavation start time, requiring an operator to provide electronic status, and updates, to the notification center.
- Requiring excavators and operators to report damages to the notification center within 24 hours.
- Changing the limits of penalties for excavators and non-pipeline utility operators not to exceed $5,000 for each violation per required notice. Subsequent violations would be subject to a civil penalty not to exceed $10,000 for each violation with a maximum civil penalty not to exceed $20,000.
- Requiring excavators to notify the notification center if marks are missing or incorrect, and requiring an operator to contact the excavator within three hours once notification has been made.

MnOPS sent a survey to various parties in regards to the changes and held a meeting Sept. 19 in St. Paul. The agency has reportedly said it intended to send finalized language to the Legislature by Oct. 9.

MMUA has been in contact with Gopher State One Call representatives and members in regards to the MnOPS proposal.
Although it had no obligation to do so, the City of Benson will share, with Swift County and the local school district, a portion of the $20 million it is receiving from Xcel Energy.

Xcel agreed to the payments to compensate for the loss of property taxes following the demolition of the privately-owned Benson Power biomass electric generating plant.

The city will share the payments with the county and school district based on current tax statement percentages, for two years.

Demolition of much of the site is expected to be complete this year, although the fuel hall and administration buildings will be left. The city plans to buy the 77-acre site and buildings from Xcel for around $1.7 million and sell the assets to Brightmark Energy, which has been pursuing development of an anaerobic digestion facility on the site.

Severe thunderstorms rolled through southeastern Minnesota the evening of Sept. 24. Storms in southern Goodhue County produced wind speeds of 70 mph. Thousands of people in southern Goodhue County were reportedly left without power.

Rochester reported winds upwards of 60 mph and downed trees, roof damage, and damage to property. RPU reported approximately 850 customers affected by outages. All customers had power restored by mid-afternoon.

Damage and power outages also hit Lake City, where an E0 tornado was reported. Following a call from the city to MMUA, two-person mutual aid crews and bucket trucks were dispatched from Shakopee Public Utilities and Owatonna Public Utilities. Crews worked 14-hour days in Lake City for approximately three days.

The Willmar Municipal Utilities district heating system is shutting down July 1, 2020, and, as of late July, there were still 122 residential and small business properties hooked up to the system.

Work is underway in Truan to consolidate city and public utilities staffs, in the wake of the Aug. 13 special election to abolish the Truan Public Utilities Commission. Utility employees were represented by a union, and the parties are discussing several issues.

The City of Fairmont is following up last year’s deployment of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) water meters with a rollout of AMI electric meters.

Missouri River Energy Services is working with Great River Energy on a project to rebuild 38 miles of transmission line in Big Stone and Stevens counties. Public information open houses were held in August. Construction is expected in 2021.

The project involves 24 miles of MRES-owned 115-kV line and 14 miles of GRE-owned 115-kV line. The work is needed to accommodate additional wind generation.

Demolition of GRE’s Elk River Energy Recovery Station power plant is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2020. The plant has been an Elk River landmark for nearly 70 years.

Delano Water, Light and Power Commission and Wright-Hennepin Cooperative Electric association recently requested the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to update its electric service territory records.

The change will reflect an agreed-upon permanent transfer of 67.57 acres and no customers from the cooperative to the municipal. The area is a developing residential subdivision on the city’s southwest side.

The North Branch Water and Light Commission and East Central Energy also recently requested the MPUC update the official service territory map to reflect an agreed-upon change in their territory boundaries.

The request concerned the permanent transfer of two lots in a residential subdivision from the cooperative to the municipal.

Both transfers were requested under Minn. Stat. 216B.44(a).

The privately-owned Benson Power facility will be largely demolished by the end of the year. A California-based renewable energy developer is interested in parts of the site.
commission had developed and maintained good relationships, the discussion was never contentious.

“We bounced things off of each other,” is how Weiss put it.

Eventually, the commission and city agreed that several positions, including that of utility superintendent, would be combined into a Public Works Director position. The city would pay part of the Public Works Director’s salary, and the PUC would pay all the benefits. In turn, the PUC paid part of the city manager’s expenses. This arrangement also ensured that the city and the commission would be involved in a close working relationship.

And good relationships are key, Weiss said. “We weren’t adversarial at all. We looked at the bigger picture.”

The utility is still governed by the five-member Sleepy Eye Public Utilities Commission. Utility and city accounting are separated. The city and the utility keep separate books and undergo separate audits. Amber Somerfeld does public utilities accounting and is a city employee, funded by the commission. She is assisted by utility billing clerk Deb Brand.

The city/utility employs five-plus in the office. When a long-time public utilities bookkeeper retired a year and a half ago, the public utilities office was transferred from the power plant offices to city hall.

While issues have arisen over the years, Weiss said the arrangement is working well, and provides a number of benefits. For instance, even though overall employee numbers are reduced, there is a larger pool of employees to serve on-call.

Elston was well-suited to lead the transition, having worked previously as superintendent of streets and utilities in the City of Plainview, Neb. Plainview’s utilities included electrical distribution, generation, water and wastewater, same as Sleepy Eye.

While he knew his stuff, the transition hasn’t always been easy. People typically identified as either public works or public utilities employees. That distinction has lessened over the years, with personnel changes and the routine of working together.

“We all work together,” said Elston. With his replacement as public works director still in process, he added that he might be among those clearing snow this winter.

Seeking the common good, Weiss is retired after a 42-year career in the telecommunications industry. He started as a Sleepy Eye Telephone Company switch technician and later became the company’s general manager. He helped move the company into the digital age and guided it through a number of mergers, eventually ending his career in 2012 as general manager of Hector Communications.

While the company always sought efficiencies, said Weiss, its owners believed that if the community did well, the company would benefit.

The quest for efficiency while seeking the good of the community carried over into Weiss’ local involvement. Along with managing the local phone company and serving on the PUC, Weiss served on the local credit union board. While he might have to identify which ‘hat’ he is wearing when talking with a legislator, he always kept the good of the community in mind.

That selfless dedication displayed by local policymakers and staff have Sleepy Eye poised for growth in the coming years.

Sleepy Eye: continued from front page

With a decline in population from 3,599 at the 2010 census to an estimated 3,404 in 2017, the City of Sleepy Eye has ramped up its economic development efforts, and they are bearing fruit.

The City Economic Development Authority (EDA) has fostered development of new commercial and residential areas on the east side of the city, 10 miles from New Ulm, including a new event center. The event center replaces an aging privately-owned facility.

The EDA received grants to help pay for roughly half of a new $3.5 million corridor on its east side, including a railroad crossing, and will move forward with that as well.

The closing will have a huge ripple effect, but “we won’t roll the sidewalks up,” Elston said. Two big street and utility projects, with cost of approximately $12 million, are scheduled for next year. These include the city’s largest street project ever: 70 blocks, with complete reconstruction of utilities and street surface on half the area. The city also received grants to help pay for roughly half of a new $3.5 million corridor on its east side, including a railroad crossing, and will move forward with that as well.

Sleepy Eye city hall is located on U.S. Hwy. 14, the main east-west thoroughfare in the city.
RPU: continued from front page

attaining 100 percent renewable energy by 2031. The resulting Energy Action Plan was approved by the City Council in 2016. The plan includes the electric greenhouse gas reduction targets in state law, including 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2025, and 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2050.

Electricity supply planning

RPU is well-positioned to meet its community’s preferred power supply future. The utility has a peak demand of approximately 300 megawatts and roughly 95 percent of its power is supplied by SMMPA. This power supply contract expires March 31, 2030, something RPU has been planning for since 1999.

The utility has an obligation as a Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) market participant to own or contract for a certain amount of electric generating capacity. RPU can meet its obligations either from resources it owns or contracts for, through the MISO market. Gas-fired and renewable resources are the only realistic resource options it could construct.

Coal has already been eliminated from RPU’s resource portfolio, except from whatever percentage of coal is included in its purchases from the wholesale market. (The percentage of coal in the market varies from time to time but is currently estimated at 40 percent. Retirements of coal-fired plants are anticipated to reduce market capacity availability and increase energy prices.)

To help meet its capacity requirements based on a peak one-hour forecasted load, RPU will keep its 49-megawatt natural gas-fired combustion turbine installed in 2002, while decommissioning an older unit at the end of its useful life. It will also continue to operate its 46-megawatt Westside Energy Station, completed in 2017. This plant’s five highly-efficient natural gas-fired reciprocating internal combustion engines can go from start-up to full load in minutes — particularly valuable as a tool to ‘firm up’ renewable energy resources.

RPU’s Latest Resource Plan

At the direction of its board, RPU contracted for modeling of resource plan scenarios looking out beyond 2030. Scenarios addressed included assumptions of 25, 50 and 75 percent penetration of renewables, as well as two 100 percent renewable energy scenarios — one based on energy use (kWh), the other based on capacity (MW). Meanwhile, the consultant hired by RPU prepared three white papers discussing the topics of demand-side management (DSM), electric vehicles, and battery storage.

The results of the study made clear that a least-cost ‘base case’ scenario for RPU, to cover the load currently served by SMMPA plus projected growth, would contain no less than 40 percent renewables and has a 20-year present value cost of just over $1 billion. Of the five scenarios presented to the RPU board in July, the board directed staff to pursue a 100 percent renewable energy plan and continue analysis of Scenario 3 and 5 for required capacity.

Scenario Three: 100 Percent Renewable Energy

Scenario 3 includes 450 megawatts of wind and 50 megawatts of solar for the renewable energy, and a natural gas fired combustion turbine for the capacity requirement. This plan is estimated to cost 0.8 percent more than the $1 billion “base case.”

But relying almost entirely on renewables is estimated to increase the average monthly residential bill only 2 percent. This option includes construction of a new $140-150 million, 220-megawatt natural gas-powered power plant. Renewable energy would be purchased to offset power the city uses annually, under this plan.

Greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 90 percent by 2030, 20 years earlier than the Energy Action Plan’s 80 percent by 2050 reduction goal.

Scenario Five: 100 Percent Renewable Capacity

Scenario Five uses a battery in place of the combustion turbine for capacity. Battery storage, it is estimated, would eliminate greenhouse gas emissions (except those resulting from market purchases to charge the battery) at a cost of 11 percent over the “base case,” but result in a nearly 18 percent rate increase. There are also concerns over the ability of battery storage to carry the utility through times of highest electric demand or events such as last winter’s polar vortex. The board directed staff to continue analyzing this option as battery technology and prices continue to evolve.

An April survey showed 57 percent of the utility’s customers would be willing to pay up to $5 a month for more clean energy, 25 percent were willing to pay up to $10 more and one-third were not willing to pay more.

Reliable service was the top expectation.

The utility also plans to ramp up its already aggressive ‘demand side’ management programs. Studies show it has reduced peak demand by 78 MW over last 10 years. How to best serve and utilize electric vehicles, time of use rates, energy storage, load management and other issues are all either underway or under study.

The need to build more transmission in the region, resulting costs, and regulatory issues are all issues that may impact RPU’s planning going forward. While uncertainties remain, it is clear that Rochester is marching toward to an increasingly clean energy future.
MnDOT report recommends more electric vehicles for ‘low-carbon’ transportation

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Minnesota Department of Transportation Sept. 18 released Pathways to Decarbonizing Transportation in Minnesota, a new report that aims to get the State of Minnesota on track to meet future goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the 2007 Next Generation Energy Act.

Pathways makes state-level recommendations, including adoption of clean car standards that would require auto manufacturers to offer more models of electric vehicles (EVs) in Minnesota to improve consumer choice and help build the market for new and used EVs in the state. The Pathways report includes a number of other action items that MnDOT will pursue, including the creation of a Sustainable Transportation Advisory Council, regional collaboration on electric vehicle corridors, and analyzing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in transportation projects.

“Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is critical to MnDOT’s vision of maximizing the health of people, the environment and our economy,” said Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher. “I’m proud of the proactive efforts our team has taken to engage the public and other agencies in this discussion, and develop meaningful actions and recommendations that will help Minnesota achieve a low-carbon transportation future.”

To obtain input on the topics, the Great Plains Institute facilitated meetings across the state and provided an online survey and webinar for additional feedback. Several themes emerged, including:
• A recognition of the climate crisis and a need for swift action
• The need for more transportation options
• Environmental justice and equity to be at the center of climate action
• Integration of transportation solutions with energy creation, land use choices and state/local policy.

“Decarbonizing transportation in Minnesota will capitalize on the state’s resource base, history of technology innovation, and extraordinary market momentum toward cleaner mobility options,” said Rolf Nordstrom, President and CEO at the Great Plains Institute.

“Minnesotans are concerned about climate change and want to see meaningful action,” added Will Seuffert, Executive Director of the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board.

Pathways was funded by MnDOT and the Environmental Quality Board, and the project steering committee included the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Minnesota Department of Commerce.

The full report is available at: www.mndot.gov/sustainability/pathways

MMUA-member cities featured at House ‘Mini’ Session

Municipal utility cities were featured prominently Oct. 4-6 as the Minnesota House of Representatives held a “mini session” in southeastern Minnesota.

Austin and Rochester were featured prominently Oct. 2. The Energy and Climate Finance and Policy Committees held a hearing on Rochester clean energy initiatives and tour energy facilities in that city, along with the Mayo Clinic.

In Austin, relevant committees toured the Hormel plant and Hormel Institute; Riverland Community College, municipal wastewater treatment plant and watershed district projects, occupied city hall for a census/redistricting hearing, and participated in local school tours.

The City of Caledonia Four Seasons Community Center was the site of a Thursday, Oct. 5 taxes and property tax hearing.

Jobs, economic development and energy and climate policy committees toured MidEnergy Cooperative in Rushford that day, for hearings on broadband development and disaster aid and energy policy and initiatives.

On Friday, the Veterans and Military Affairs committee visited the Veterans Cemetery in Preston.

Along with these MMUA-member cities, Winona served as host for a number of activities and hearings.

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Westbrook expands services; readies for coming improvements

It has been a busy year at Westbrook Municipal Light & Power, and next year promises to even busier.

Meadowland Farmers Co-operative, headquartered in Lamberton, is completing a $5.5 million upgrade of its Westbrook grain receiving facility. The municipal utility invested $160,000 in an upgraded electric service. The three-man crew installed the service itself, including placing the 10,800 pound transformer. A contractor was brought in to do the underground boring work.

With a new residential development underway, the utility is also looking at installing new gas mains to the area. Several privately-owned properties on either side of the municipal power plant have come up for sale in recent years, and the utility now owns a two-block stretch of property. It is in the early stages of discussing, with its power supplier, a possible renewable energy development adjacent to the power plant and substation.

A frigid winter didn’t bring any slowdown in activity, as record-breaking January cold, mixed with high winds, led to water tower damage. Expansion loosened the protective paint coating and the wind blew sections of paint free of the metal.

The tower was built in 1975 and repainted a number of times since then. Replacement costs were estimated at $1.4 million. Plans call for a $500,000 refurbishment in 2020, including removal of lead-based paint and upgrades to comply with current OSHA standards.

The city’s main downtown thoroughfare is also scheduled for a rebuild next year. Water mains are in good shape following extensive work in 2009, but the utility will be busy installing new streetlights. New curb and gutter and sidewalks will also be installed.

Utility Superintendent Dan Joel is assisted by lineworkers Levi Brunner and John Duerksen. The trio also handles the natural gas distribution and water systems. The men also help out wherever needed, including recent work on several park facilities. Kelly Beaty is the utility office manager.

The city crew operates the wastewater system.

Westbrook gave up its cable TV system on Jan. 1. Woodstock Communications out of Ruthton, obtained a $412,391 grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development which helped fund what the company called a million-dollar fiber optic communications system expansion in Westbrook. The communications company said it is also building out a fiber system in Tyler.

The Westbrook municipal electric utility has been in business since 1938 and serves approximately 485 electric customers.
Electric Systems Technician or Electric Substation & Maintenance Technician
Want to do meaningful work that has a real impact on the community? The New Ulm Public Utilities Commission is currently seeking a full-time Electric Systems Technician or an Electric Substation & Maintenance Technician. Responsibilities will include maintaining, troubleshooting and repairing electrical systems in the power plant, substations, municipal utility buildings and structures. Position requires a high school diploma or equivalent and a valid drivers’ license. Completion of an accredited vocational electrical/electronic school training program and one year of directly related work experience required. An additional three years of directly related work experience may substitute for the vocational training requirement. Position requires a Minnesota Maintenance Electrician’s license or to have the qualified time to test and receive the license within six months of appointment. A Minnesota Master’s Electrician’s license may substitute for a Minnesota Maintenance Electrician’s license. Pay range is $29.47 - $39.01 per hour. Please see both job postings for the pay range and required qualifications. We will only fill one of the positions. You must apply online by visiting our website at www.newulmmn.gov. Please call the Human Resources Office at 507-359-8235 with any questions. Application deadline is 4 p.m. on Nov. 3. EOE

Water & Gas Distribution Maintenance
The City of Two Harbors is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Water & Gas Distribution Maintenance. Under the general direction of the Gas, Water & Sanitary Sewer Supervisor, the Water & Gas Distribution Maintenance performs a variety of semi-skilled and skilled maintenance work and operates a variety of equipment in the construction, operation, repair, maintenance, and replacement of City gas, water and sanitary sewer facilities. Applications and a position description, which includes a list of duties and responsibilities, necessary knowledge, skills and abilities are available at City Hall, or on...
The City of Saint Peter, Minnesota, is currently accepting applications for the position of Maintenance Superintendent in the Department of Public Works. Minimum qualifications include a high school diploma and associates degree in construction, construction management, Public Works operations or equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experience in a related field may be equivalent, five year’s experi...
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- (1) tri-fold ruler, (3) foldable “MARK” markers, (1) foldable “HIT” marker, whiteboard, marker set and eraser all compacted neatly into a 13” x 17” drawstring backpack.

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Upcoming Events

T&O Conference
December 3-5
Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, St. Cloud

The ‘T & O’ is a not-to-be-missed event for Managers, Crew Leads, Lineworkers and others. This is the perfect venue to join fellow public power professionals to hear interesting speakers on timely topics, participate in discussions, share ideas and connect with friends old and new.

This year’s Conference features these dynamic general session presentations and thought-provoking speakers:

- Jay Gubrud—who will challenge everyone to eliminate the everyday roadblocks to success, while honoring the differences that make us unique.
- Bruce Stumpe, Association of Missouri Electric Cooperatives, along with his wife Darla, share a personal story of Complacency—One of Safety’s Worst Enemies.
- Scott Meinecke, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives - The Power of a Minute. This program will help you focus on the true value of a minute as it pertains to getting our brothers and sisters home.
- Department of Labor and Industry Apprentice standard developed with MMUA.
- Mike Willetts, MMUA
- Open Forum Discussion on Mutual Aid

Transformer School and Pre-Conference
December 10-13
MMUA Training Center, Marshall

The Pre-Conference will focus on Basic Single-Phase Transformer Connection and Theory. The Transformer School will focus on Three-Phase Transformer Connections.

At this workshop, you’ll take instruction from Scott Meinecke and apply it to a miniature transformer bank. Working in small groups, troubleshoot a variety of single phase and 3-phase scenarios. Once you’ve fixed the problem, test it and see first hand what worked and what didn’t work!

The Transformer School offers the ultimate combination of classroom and hands-on training to improve your understanding of transformers, appropriate installations and applications for maximum reliability.

Overhead/Underground Line Design
January 21-22, MMUA, Plymouth

Good design is fundamental to a properly-functioning electric distribution system. Attend this new MMUA workshop and better understand elements of system design.

Taught by R. John Miner, a registered professional engineer with over 45 years of experience in the industry. Miner has been a frequent presenter for MMUA over the years, and has led APPA workshops for 30 years or more.

For more, see the ‘Events’ calendar at www.mmua.org or contact Theresa Noddermeyer at 763.551.1230 or tnoddermeyer@mmua.org

16th Edition APPA Safety Manual now available at a reduced cost of $22.00 plus tax. Shipping is extra, unless your MMUA Safety Professional can deliver. Or, place an order in advance and we’ll have them ready for pick up at the T & O in December.

To place an order, contact rkelly@mmua.org or call 763.551.1230

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