MMUA Annual Conference remains a constant in tumultuous times

We may live in tumultuous times, but one constant over the years has been the annual gathering of Minnesota’s municipal electric utilities. The MMUA Annual Summer Conference, held Aug. 21-23 at Madden’s Resort in Brainerd, marked the 86th annual gathering of the state’s Public Power utilities.

Approximately 335 representatives from municipal utilities, associate and affiliate members and others attended.

The gathered members elected new officers and board members. John Crooks, general manager of Shakopee Public Utilities, assumed the president’s duties, at the conclusion of the meeting, from Sleepy Eye’s Bob Elston.

Greg French, general manager of the Virginia Department of Public Utilities, was elected by the members as board president-elect. And the board elected Detroit Lakes Public Utility General Manager Vernell Roberts as its secretary-treasurer.

The membership representatives approved an overall 5 percent dues increase (individual members results will vary depending on 2015 sales and revenue).

Along with conducting their business and honoring its leading people and utilities, members heard a variety of top-notch speakers and also managed to have a little fun along the way.

Lemond Solar Center unveiled

Owatonna Public Utilities Chair Dale Simon made remarks during an ‘open house’ at the Lemond Solar Center, on the outskirts of Owatonna, the afternoon of Thursday, July 13. All output from the 5-mega-watt (ac) project is sold to the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) through a 20-year Power Purchase Agreement. SMMPA also partnered with Central Municipal Power Agency/Services (CMPAS), which will buy 280 kilowatts of output.

photo by Steve Downer

Municipal electric helps keep the best of Lanesboro while moving it forward

by Steve Downer

Lanesboro is a popular Minnesota bluff country vacation spot for bicyclists and canoeists. Reflecting the city it serves, Lanesboro Public Utilities is keeping the best of its existing assets while modernizing others to provide safe, efficient utility service.

Some improvements are behind the scenes; others are center stage.

The most prominent work involves the Lanesboro Stone Dam. Built in 1868 by immigrant craftsmen using unmortared limestone blocks, it is one of only six gravity arch dams in the United States.

Unfortunately, the dam’s condition has deteriorated to the point that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources labeled it a “high hazard.” That means its failure could lead to major consequences for people and property downstream.

The dam is also a centerpiece and destination point for a Root River tourist economy that

Lanesboro: see back page

The Lanesboro dam and diversion channel for the hydroelectric plant are shown in this photo from spring of 2007.
Members elect Austin’s Nibaur, Willmar’s Laumer to MMUA board or directors

Member delegates at the MMUA Annual Conference elected two new members to the Board of Directors: Mark Nibaur from Austin and Carol Laumer from Willmar.

Laumer has been a regular and active participant in both APPA and MMUA conferences. She is past president and former legislative council chair of the Midwest Association of Medical Equipment Services. Laumer was elected to a seat reserved for a policymaker, which was formerly held by Bill Wroolie of the Bismarck Public Utilities Commission.

Nibaur, General Manager for Austin Utilities, was elected to fill the board seat formerly held by Redwood Falls Public Utilities Superintendent Chuck Heins. Nibaur has been a regular and active participant in both APPA and MMUA conferences. She is past president and former legislative council chair of the Midwest Association of Medical Equipment Services.

In 2010, Nibaur accepted the position of General Manager for Austin Utilities. Nibaur was previously employed for 23 years, by MidAmerican Energy in Sioux City, Iowa as Operations Manager. He received his MBA from the University of South Dakota-Vermillion.

Nibaur is involved with a number of local organizations, including serving as a board officer for the Development Corporation of Austin, an economic development organization.

Nibaur is president of the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency board of directors.

Earlier this year, he joined the American Public Gas Association’s Board of Directors, where he begins a three-year term. APGA is a national, not-for-profit association representing the nation’s public-ly-owned natural gas distribution systems.

MMUA welcomes Nibaur and Laumer to its board, and thanks Wroolie and Heins for their dedicated years of service.

MPUC accepts MN Power service quality, reliability reports


Reports for the two years were combined because the Department of Commerce said it “lacked adequate resources” to review and analyze reports earlier.

MPUC set the utility’s reliability standards for 2017, as proposed by the company:

- System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI): 104.61.
- System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI): 95.10.
- Customer Average Interruption Duration Index (CAIDI): 51.80.

In its filing, Minnesota Power (MP) noted that residential customers comprise less than 10 percent of its total annual delivery. More than half of its supply is sold to industrial customers that operate around the clock. The utility is also winter peaking. MP said it balances its reliability goals against the need to leverage capital investments while efficiently managing its operating expenses.

The company noted that its ‘storm normalized’ actual results for 2016 were:

- SAIDI in minutes: 122.69.
- SAIFI (number of outages per customer) 1.29.
- These numbers were higher than in 2015, but its service territory was “ravaged by severe thunderstorms,” noted the company.

The company said it is focusing on increasing the frequency of maintenance related to distribution switches and placement of automated switches.
Sen. Murkowski addresses barriers to improving, expanding energy infrastructure

by Paul Ciampoli

In a Q&A with the American Public Power Association, Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, detailed what she sees as the biggest barriers for improving and expanding the country’s energy infrastructure and why she thinks public power utilities are uniquely positioned to effectively address energy infrastructure issues.

(In 2016, Murkowski received the Association’s Public Service Award, which recognizes a publicly elected or appointed official at the national or state level whose actions have furthered the objectives of public power.)

What are the biggest barriers for improving and expanding the country’s energy infrastructure?

The United States is home to some of the most robust and reliable energy infrastructure in the world, but it is almost always an afterthought—until it breaks down. Much of our nation’s infrastructure is privately owned and maintained. Building and upgrading it is an expensive and time-consuming process. Hundreds of projects, representing billions of dollars of investment, are currently navigating the federal labyrinth of permitting processes. Multiple agencies, numerous applications, and duplicative requirements make the permitting process cumbersome and can unnecessarily delay projects for years. The federal process is also layered on top of state and local permitting processes, with little to no apparent coordination, which only adds to the difficulty of “getting to yes” on these important projects.

What steps can be taken legislatively to address energy infrastructure issues?

I strongly support the new administration’s decision to make infrastructure a national priority. We are talking about building things, again. As chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I am working with administration officials and my colleagues to develop ideas for a broad infrastructure package. In fact, our committee is already ready to contribute to it. [Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia is chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.]

During the development of our bipartisan energy bill last Congress, we sought to address our energy infrastructure challenges. Our bill, which passed the Senate by a vote of 85-12, included provisions that could fit seamlessly in an infrastructure package, whether it is streamlining the permitting process for LNG exports, enhancing electricity delivery, or improving the regulatory process for hydropower, natural gas pipeline, and mineral projects.

What additional steps can the federal government take to expand the use of hydropower in the U.S.?

I often say that hydropower is our hardest-working renewable resource, but it rarely gets the credit it deserves. The U.S. has 100 gigawatts of installed capacity that produces emissions-free, baseload power, but we have our work cut out for us on the regulatory side. A third of our nation’s hydropower dams will require license renewals by 2030, but relicensing an existing project can cost tens of millions of dollars and take a decade or longer. In our bipartisan energy bill, we sought to enact common sense reforms, such as designating the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as the lead agency for purposes of establishing an enforceable agency schedule, and eliminating duplicative or unnecessary studies. During conference, we sought to go even further by expediting approvals for non-powered dams, given that only three percent of the country’s dams are actually electrified.

With respect to cybersecurity threats, what steps can the power sector and the federal government take to protect the nation’s power grid and other elements of the energy infrastructure?

We have long recognized that our nation’s energy sector is a popular target for bad actors. With the enactment of the Energy Policy Act in 2005, and the subsequent certification of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) as the Electric Reliability Organization, the power sector has been working collaboratively with the federal government to protect our grid system from both cybersecurity and physical threats. The industry stakeholder process, authorized by that law has led to the formulation of mandatory standards and fostered a robust public-private partnership. And last Congress, via the FAST Act, we codified the Department of Energy’s role as the sector-specific agency and provided the Secretary with the authority to address grid-related emergencies. We also included provisions to protect sensitive information from disclosure in order to facilitate information sharing and help close the gaps identified by industry. Given the ever-evolving nature of the cyber threat, the federal government must continue to share actionable information with our private partners, including granting needed security clearances on a timely basis.

Would you say that public power utilities are uniquely positioned to effectively address energy infrastructure issues given their focus on local communities?

Yes, absolutely. Because public power utilities are owned and operated at the local level, they have a special position of trust with their customers and communities. These utilities offer not-for-profit services, thereby keeping electricity affordable for the 49 million people they serve. Like all of our nation’s utilities, I know how important it is to keep the responsibility of keeping the lights on as paramount, which means having safe and reliable infrastructure in place.
The President’s Award is MMUA’s highest individual achievement award.

Bob Elston of Sleepy Eye—2016-2017 MMUA President—said deciding on this award was daunting at first, particularly given the caliber of recent award winners, but then he realized that he just needed to determine the person he most respected in the industry.

With that thought in mind, his choice was quite clear, said Elston: Steve Thompson, CEO of Central Minnesota Power Agency Services (CMPAS).

This year, CMPAS is celebrating its 30th year as a municipal power agency. The mere fact that CMPAS even exists today is in large part due to Thompson, said Elston. It is the smallest municipal power agency in Minnesota and is also different in that individual members choose if they want to participate in projects or not, which means members must be thoroughly educated to make wise decisions.

There were things that needed to get done in 2005, a time of transition at the agency, and someone had to do them. Thompson was al-

ways willing to step up and do what needed to be done. Even before becoming CEO, he spent months going toe to toe with a large investor-owned utility, to convince it that it was overcharging under the new MISO ‘Day 2’ market. He eventually won that argument and the agency received a rebate on the overcharges and a lower rate.

Other milestones under Thompson’s leadership:

• In 2007, CMPAS became a Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) Transmission Owner. Again, that was before Thompson was officially CEO but he had the biggest role to play in it.

• In 2010, CMPAS established a power supply coalition of members and affiliates to evaluate baseload options.

• In 2013, CMPAS organized another power supply coalition to investigate intermediate resources.

• Perhaps the biggest accomplishment came in 2011, in a landmark order federal regulators granted CMPAS approval for a hypothetical capital structure transmission incentive. This was no small task. Thompson and Bob Jablon argued that municipal utilities investing in transmission deserved the same 12.38 percent rate of return that other utilities were granted.

• In 2012, CMPAS closed on its first tax-exempt bondings for CapX.

Elston. “His work ethic is impeccable and his actions are in the best interest of the agency. He is totally dedicated to his craft and to his job. “As I said in the beginning, I highly doubt that CMPAS would even exist were it not for Steve. I am proud to know him and to present him the 2017 MMUA Presidents award!”
The MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee selected three entities for 2017 System Innovation Awards. This award is given to those that have demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renewables, technology, or other areas.

Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
The Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (MMPA) received an MMUA System Innovation Award, presented at Aug. 22. MMPA was the first power agency to put a wind turbine in each member community (in 2010) and the Agency is now in the process of providing grants for demonstration solar projects at educational facilities in each member community. The first five kilowatt (kW) installations have been completed.

MMPA also annually offers energy education for elementary schools. Designed to integrate into Minnesota’s 4th grade science standards, the tours use interactive educational stations to teach students how electricity is generated from multiple sources, including natural gas, wind and solar, as well as how it is transmitted and used.

MMPA provides in-school assemblies to its member communities that are not within convenient reach of the power plant. The program has reached over 12,000 students since its inception in 2012. MMPA’s eight megawatt (MW) Hometown BioEnergy facility, located in the member community of Le Sueur, has won national awards as a dispatchable renewable facility. The facility also serves the local community by accepting agricultural and food processing waste products, reducing the amount of material going to landfills.

The new Shakopee Energy Park (SEP) project is an innovative 46 MW power facility. This fast-starting, fuel-efficient project complements MMPA’s existing portfolio of natural gas and renewable resources. The project is unique in its use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a backup fuel.

SEP is a close neighbor to Canterbury Park and was designed to blend into the aesthetics of the community. SEP also recovers heat from the engines and stores it in a large hot water tank. This is used to heat the plant and is also available for sale to support the development of nearby facilities in a district heating system.

Elk River Municipal Utilities
The Elk River Municipal Utilities (ERMU) Water Department has, over the past three years, completed extensive rehabilitations and upgrades on all of its water treatment plants. Projects included replacing old chemical feed equipment, replacing out-of-date motor control centers, and having the coatings on the filters sandblasted off and replaced with new epoxy coatings. The improvements have reduced annual hydrant flushing by one day, saving the utility millions of gallons in wasted water. Wells were brought up to code compliance resulting in safer arc flash ratings. And, the average power factor went from 83 to 99.

The water department has developed and instituted many preventative maintenance standards including a maintenance program for all 1,200 plus hydrants in the municipal system and over 200 private hydrants. A new leak detection program has reduced loss by over six million gallons a month. The system should be free of undetected underground leaks by the end of this year.

Initiatives have been completed by just three water operators. The operators have remained motivated and focused, resulting in a municipal water system that consistently delivers high quality water to the customers of Elk River Municipal Utilities.

City of Pierre, South Dakota
The City of Pierre recently partnered with Geronimo Energy and Missouri River Energy Services to create a five acre, one MW solar photovoltaic site.

The city also recently moved to an automated metering infrastructure for their electric and water meters, greatly expanding its capabilities and giving customers a range of valuable information.

The city has also switched to LED street lighting throughout the city. To date, nearly one-quarter of the approximately 3,000 lights have been converted from older, inefficient technologies. City buildings have also begun to be converted to LED in office spaces, exterior security lighting and interior shop spaces as well.
Meeting:
continued from front page

Official meeting events started the evening of Monday, Aug. 21 with a welcome reception and outdoor barbeque. Earlier that afternoon, people gathered for a golf tournament or bike ride along with Paul Bunyan Trail.


Following a delicious luncheon, afternoon offerings were divided into concurrent tracks—one designed for managers, the other for policymakers.

The policymakers track was led by John Miner of Collaborative Learning and was titled Taking Care of Business: Effective Governance for Public Sector Utilities. This track quickly filled its quota of 60 people.

Other offerings included: Natural Gas Generation and Infrastructure Readiness, by Theresa Pugh; Hometown Connections and Industry Trends, by Tim Blodgett; How Perimeter Cybersecurity Leaves You Exposed, by Scott Mossbrooke of N-Dimension Solutions; Technology for a Diverse Low-Carbon Energy Portfolio, by Mike Holmes of the Lignite Energy Council; Solar Rules & Standards by Bill Black of MMUA; State Legislative Developments by Black and Amanda Duerr of MMUA and Doug Carnival of McGrann Shea; the Issues Round-Up by Jack Kegel of MMUA.

MMUA thanks all who attended, the cities/utilities that sent them, trade show exhibitors and our annual and conference sponsors.


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MMUA thanks all who attended, the cities/utilities that sent them, trade show exhibitors and our annual and conference sponsors.


Bent Brown of FS3 and Chris Karsten of Irby Company visited at the trade show.
Rykken caps 35 years of public service with Honorary Lifetime Membership

Dennis Rykken, at the Annual Summer Conference, received an MMUA Honorary Lifetime Membership. This prestigious award symbolizes a long professional life dedicated not only to the advancement of municipal utilities locally, but also for the betterment of our industry on a statewide basis. Rykken recently retired after 27 years with the Sauk Centre PUC.

In 1982 he was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Sauk Centre city council. He was elected in 1984 and served on the council until 1989. In 1990, Rykken was appointed to the Sauk Centre Public Utilities Commission, which oversees the operation of the municipal electric, water and wastewater utilities. He served as commission chair for more than 20 years.

Three times Rykken was appointed to serve as mayor, having been appointed to fill terms in each case. He was elected to the MMUA board in 2008, and served as president from 2012-2013. He has also been active in other public power organizations, including the American Public Power Association and Missouri River Energy Services.

This year’s honorees include John Crooks and the rest of SPU General Manager John Crooks.

Three receive recognition as ‘Rising Stars’

Three received MMUA Rising Star awards. This award recognizes a future leader who has demonstrated a dedication to the goals and principles of municipal utilities through problem solving, creativity, and job knowledge. This year’s honorees include Christian Fenstermacher of Shakopee Public Utilities and Charliene Jones and Heather Nolan of the Proctor Public Utilities Commission.

Fenstermacher came to SPU as an Engineering Intern. He soon earned the trust and respect of co-workers and supervisors. He assumed greater duties, earned his Professional Engineer certification, and is now SPU Project Engineer. He understands the concept and mission of ‘Public Power,’ and is a champion of ratepayers and the utility. He is always willing to help smaller municipal utilities with issues that have been brought to his attention. Despite the pressure of meeting the demands of rapid growth, Christian is handling projects with his usual professional demeanor, all while adhering to SPU’s mission and policies. He has also completed many other smaller projects with professional skill.

SPU General Manager John Crooks and the rest of the SPU staff hope this “Rising Star” stays with them for a long time.

Moses recognized with Community Service Award

Steve Moses was recognized with the MMUA Community Service Award. This award is given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level. Moses has brought immeasurable value to the municipal utilities he has served over a career that has spanned more than 40 years. It seems that everybody who knows Steve speaks well of him.

Since 2009, Moses has served as customer relations and marketing manager for Heartland Consumers Power District. Prior to joining Heartland, Moses worked tirelessly for 35 years as utilities manager of Madelia Municipal Light & Power, where according to his former co-workers he was a great manager and friend.

During his time in Madelia, he negotiated power contracts with wholesale suppliers and oversaw a major power plant expansion. He also worked on a major wastewater treatment plant project and made sure the municipal utility grew along with the city it serves. Moses always made sure the utility department helped all other city departments if needed. He was always willing to lend a hand.

An overnight fire broke out in Madelia on February 2016. Moses immediately offered assistance at the utility office. Later, he helped connect local leaders with lobbyists, a move that helped lead to more than $1 million in state funding to help Madelia business owners recover and rebuild.

Moses would have done the same for any Heartland customer. Heartland CEO Russell Olson said he has often heard his agency’s customers say, “What would we do without Steve?”

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September 2017 The Resource/7
Efforts of Moltzan and Adams recognized with Distinguished Service Awards

Roger Moltzan

Roger Moltzan of Detroit Lakes Public Utility and Troy Adams of Elk River Municipal Utilities received MMUA Distinguished Service Awards at the Aug. 22 Annual Conference banquet and awards ceremony. This award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

For 20 years, Moltzan has devoted hundreds of hours to the MMUA Job Training and Safety Committee, and served as Chair from 2006 until this spring. Under his leadership, the committee has planned and executed dozens of workshops and projects. A major achievement during this time was the development of the MMUA construction specifications manual.

In 2016, Moltzan led the MMUA Job Training and Safety Committee through the development and construction of the national Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo grounds in Shakopee, a process which involved 40 different utilities coming together to accomplish a major task in a few days.

Moltzan and his crews from Detroit Lakes played a major role in the development and construction of the MMUA Training Center, and the association benefited greatly from his experience and leadership skills.

During hands-on lineman workshops at the MMUA Training Center you can usually find Roger on the training field, leading and instructing the distribution maintenance class. His class has been and continues to be one of the most popular offered at the schools.

Troy Adams

Troy Adams of Elk River Municipal Utilities is in his second term on the MMUA board and was MMUA president in 2015-2016. Troy has been active in the association in a number of different areas, including service territory work groups and the Government Relations Committee.

Troy also helped develop the MMUA Leadership Academy, which is proving to be a very popular program. He has presented on various topics at MMUA and national conferences. Troy has been a tremendous advocate for public power and has given freely of his time to help state and national causes.

He continues to be one of the most popular offered at the schools.

Roger Moltzan, second from right, was the long-time chair of the MMUA Job Training and Safety Committee and remains a key instructor at schools and workshops.

One size fits all – doesn’t.
And neither do our solutions.

Troy Adams

Troy Adams

Public Service Award

Rep. Nick Zerwas

State Rep. Nick Zerwas this past session led the charge of legislation to enable the expansion of the Elk River Municipal Utilities Commission from three members to five.

A former Elk River City Councilmember, Rep. Zerwas displayed a commitment to the community, understanding of the municipally-owned utility business model, and support of Public Power ERMU and MMUA thank Rep. Zerwas for his demonstrated support through his role in public service.

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The City of Kasson, upon receipt of a consultant’s rate study, moved to effectively lower its electric rates. Individual results may vary, depending upon on a variety of factors.

The Hibbing Public Utilities Commission increased electric, gas, water and steam rates by two percent each, effective July 1. The decision followed receipt of a consultant’s cost of service study. The study recommended increases of varying amounts per service, but experience with past increases has shown that customers of a certain service would complain that they were being singled out.

The City of St. Peter will increase electric rates between 1 and 1.2 percent depending on customer type. The increase will be calculated in November and was adopted to reflect wholesale costs. Efficiencies gained from time-of-use metering nearly balanced out the wholesale increase.

Marshall Municipal Utilities, citing decreased wholesale power costs, has paid off a $3.9 million bond early. The move is expected to save the utility around $500,000 in interest expenses.

Madelia Municipal Light and Power and Lake Crystal Municipal Utilities recently partnered with a private firm to survey customers. Questions addressed customer service expectations, social media use and energy efficiency rebates, along with other topics.

The survey, which was also available online, was conducted in conjunction with the utility’s wholesale supplier.

Citing expenses due to increased load growth and power costs, the Elbow Lake Municipal Power Commission in July increased rates six percent.

The Keewatin City Council adopted a policy change that makes landlords/landowners responsible for utility bills, not renters. The change follows a recommendation from the local public utilities commission.

The New Ulm Public Utilities Commission approved purchase of electric vehicle charging station equipment, which is expected to be installed at a city parking lot near downtown.

The Minnesota River Valley Public Utilities Commission, a wastewater utility which includes the cities of Le Sueur, Henderson and a significant industrial user (SIU) has identified another industrial customer that merits the SIU identification. That could lead to a higher rate for that customer. In a desire to engage in dialogue, a letter was sent to the customer.

The Elk River Municipal Utilities Commission, newly expanded to five members, celebrated its 70th anniversary on July 11, the exact date the city council created the commission. The commission, which includes two members of the city council, celebrated with cake and a reading of the 1947 resolution.

Mark Karnowski, city administrator in Princeton has announced his retirement effective October 2017. Karnowski has been in government for more than 30 years, and served on the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities board.

R4 Solar has arrived in six CMMPA/CPMAS cities including Blue Earth, Granite Falls, Janesville, Kenyon, Kasson, and Sleepy Eye. Interested customers in those cities can purchase solar subscriptions to a local solar billboard and a utility-scale municipal project partnership. In Sleepy Eye, the local billboard project is located on the roof of the municipal power plant. Voluntary subscribers to R4 Solar gain access to a price-competitive alternative to a rooftop system. In exchange for buying a solar subscription, subscribers can achieve environmental stewardship and receive an offsetting credit on their utility bill for the solar panel’s production.

When the number of subscriptions exceeds the space available, subscriptions will be purchased from the municipally-shared Lemond Solar Center near Owatonna. A demonstration model for the R4 program is being built on land owned by Blue Earth Light & Water. Participants can purchase a 20-year subscription for output from 450-watt panels at its 29.3 kilowatt ‘Select Solar’ project. Participants are being limited to a total of six panels apiece.

The City of Kasson is lowering electric rates. Pictured above is the entrance to the city public works building.
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MMUA gained several new Associate Members in advance of its Annual Conference. These companies include:

American Engineering Testing, Inc.

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Mailing Address: 550 Cleveland Avenue North, Saint Paul, MN 55114
Phone: 651.659.9901  Toll Free: 800.972.5364
Website: www.amengtest.com

American Engineering Testing (AET) is a leading geotechnical, environmental, forensic, and construction materials testing firm providing services to municipal clients across Minnesota and the midwest. Minnesota offices include our headquarters in Saint Paul, as well as Albertville, Duluth, Mankato, Marshall, and Rochester.

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Since 1981, Banyon Data Systems has provided municipal software to over...
Lanesboro: continued from front page

brings thousands of people and millions of dollars to Bluff Country each year. Originally built to power grist mills, the dam is also part of a municipal hydroelectric system that has operated since 1895, and in 2016 generated over a million kilowatt-hours. The City of Lanesboro was loathe to see the dam dismantled.

That drove up the price tag for repairs. And that drove Lanesboro to the Minnesota Legislature. After a decade of effort, the city this past session was successful in obtaining $4 million, in state bonding money, for repairs.

An engineer briefed the city council on the project this summer. Construction is expected to begin next spring, and the city is also confronted with the very real need to locate a new site, a difficult proposition given the area’s topography.

The wastewater collection system is aging, with a lot of clay pipes that need to be replaced.

While Lanesboro is unique in being a tourist destination, it is like every other city in wondering how it is going to pay for the needed upgrades. To improve its financial condition with an impending major expense, the council this spring approved a seven percent wastewater rate increase.

Council-commission relationship formalized

The rate and financial obligations of recent and upcoming utility improvements led Lanesboro to formalize the relationship between the City and the Lanesboro Public Utilities Commission.

The three-person Commission was established years ago and its members are appointed to oversee administrative functions of the electric, water, sewer and garbage services.

After much local discussion, the result was a new ordinance, adopted by the council, which documents the jurisdiction and authority of the council and commission. The ordinance echoes the state law which provides for the establishment of a commission.

It further stipulates that when it comes to purchase of wholesale electric energy, the city retains exclusive authority. Purchases over $25,000 require council approval. The commission has the power to recommend rates, rules and regulations, while the council has ultimate authority to determine those rates and regulations.

Lots of utility work

A number of other utility upgrades are scheduled or underway.

The electric distribution system is being upgraded from a 2400 volt delta configuration to 4160 wye. Plans call for an eventual upgrade of switch gear and step-up transformer at the power plant.

A new water plant and well are now in service, at a cost of $3.4 million.

A looming issue is the wastewater treatment plant. The need for an upgrade has been established, and the city is also confronted with the very real need to locate a new site, a difficult proposition given the area’s topography.

The wastewater collection system is aging, with a lot of clay pipes that need to be replaced.

Lanesboro city hall is located adjacent to Sylvan Park, which includes a municipal campground and is within easy walking distance of downtown. Visible in the background is ‘church hill,’ which also includes an old school building recently converted to condominiums.

Payments in lieu of taxes and other items are subject to negotiation. The council retains authority over budgets and issuing bonded indebtedness.

Lanesboro: continued from front page

Jerod Wagner of Lanesboro Public Utilities inspect ed the dam in this 2007 photo.