

# THE RESOURCE

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Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association



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## Madelia Municipal Light & Power: Embracing resilience and innovation on its 85th anniversary

**As Madelia Municipal Light & Power (MMLP) celebrates its 85th anniversary, the utility's commitment to resilience and progress stands out.**

Reflecting the city's spirit of renewal and strength, MMLP continues to advance, embodying the motto, "Madelia comes back bigger and better." This year's milestone underscores the utility's dedication to overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities for growth.

A legacy of resilience. Madelia has a rich history of bouncing back from adversity. In the late 1990s, when the town's major industrial players, including a chicken processing plant and a frozen dough factory, faced significant disruptions, the closure of the dough factory was a substantial setback. "They closed the business and relocated," recalls Chris Trembley, General Manager at MMLP. "That left a mark on Madelia."

Yet, true to its resilient nature, Madelia rebounded. By 2020, Tony Downs Food Group acquired and revitalized the old frozen dough factory, transitioning it into a facility for meat and frozen food packaging. As demand grew, MMLP faced its own set of challenges, including aging infrastructure and a shift in personnel.

### Enhancing infrastructure for future growth.

Upon reviewing substation inspection reports and test results, Trembley and his team identified troubling signs of deterioration in their sole transformer. "We observed rising levels of dissolved gases, localized heating, and signs of insulation degradation," Trembley explains. "Control wires were operating at 105-112 percent of capacity on peak days." Recognizing the urgency, MMLP consulted with high-voltage equipment experts, confirming the need for action.

*Continued on page 4*



*This photo series shows the completion of Madelia's new substation. In the first photo, taken in June 2023, the initial excavations are shown. At this stage, Madelia was preparing for the delivery of the 15/28 MVA transformer, which was expected in two weeks.*

## Summer Conference brings the people of the Minnesota Municipal Utility world together in Fargo/Moorhead

**The Minnesota Municipal Utility Association's (MMUA) Annual Summer Conference was held in Fargo, North Dakota in late August.**

Events stretched over four days, providing members with education, networking, and exposure to industry suppliers' latest products and services. The event also ensured the annual business of the organization was completed with the consent of the Association's members.

On Sunday, August 18, MMUA's staff and Board of Directors began to gather at the Holiday Inn Fargo. During its last meeting of the Board year, MMUA's Directors agreed upon the dues resolution it would recommend to the membership. The Board also adopted its updated

strategic plan (see page 20 for more information) and provided Association staff with direction on operational priorities for its implementation.

Registration began on Monday, August 19 as conferencegoers started to arrive for the pre-conference workshops. This year's workshops were presented by Dave Berg, who spoke on the topic of telling your utility's story through data. Over at the beautiful Hjemkomst Center in Moorhead, officials from state and federal government agencies led a tabletop on responding to a cybersecurity threat in real time. This event challenged participants to think about how and when threats can escalate, and when it is proper to escalate your organization's response as well.

*Continued on page 12*

## What does a Walz for Vice President campaign mean for Minnesota elected officials?

*By Kent Sulem*

**With Governor Walz officially the Democrats' candidate for Vice President, it makes sense to look at some of the potential impacts of the campaign on Minnesota.**

The increased presence of national media, tighter security, and more secret service agents around town are all likely scenarios. Perhaps what will be the most obvious, however, is that he will not spend much time in Minnesota between now and early November.

This means Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan will be forced to handle more public appearances, staff more meetings, and generally be the face of the executive branch here on the home front. However, unlike in some states, she will not gain the full powers of the office of Governor. That would require

Governor Walz to resign from office, something he is not likely to do unless he and Vice President Harris win in November.

Why wouldn't Governor Walz resign early? Because there is no incentive to do so, particularly with how things stand in the Minnesota Senate where there is currently a 33-33 tie, with one vacant seat to be filled by special election on election day. The vacant seat was created when Senator Morrisson resigned to focus on her campaign to win the open congressional seat in the third district.

Why does this matter? Because the rules governing succession provide that when there is a vacancy in the office of Governor, the Lieutenant of Governor moves up and fills that vacancy. It is what happens next where things get interesting.

*Continued on page 7*

Periodicals  
Postage  
PAID  
at  
Twin Cities, MN

### Inside Stories

**7**  
Interconnection Corner:  
Interconnection Costs



**10**  
Summer Conference



**16**  
Chinese researchers  
create "meltdown-proof"  
nuclear reactor



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## Tim Stoner joins MMUA Board of Directors



**Tim Stoner has been elected to the MMUA Board of Directors.**

Tim is currently the General Manager of Blue Earth Light and Water (BELW), a position he has held since 2013. He has worked in the public power industry for 26 years, entering the field working for MMUA as a Regional Safety Coordinator in 1998.

Tim has helped strengthen BELW through numerous utility projects, including the installation

of a new SCADA system and a streetlight conversion to light-emitting diodes. BELW also recently completed a new transmission and distribution substation.

Tim currently serves as a board member for the Central Municipal Power Agency and was its Board President from 2015–2019. Tim is a graduate of Concordia University, where he received a bachelor's degree in business.

## Harold Langowski joins MMUA Board of Directors

**Harold Langowski has been elected to the MMUA Board of Directors.**

He is currently the Clerk/Treasurer/Operations Director for the City of Ely.

Harold has 24 years of experience in municipal utility operation and civil construction. He received a bachelor of science from North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota, and started his career working for RLK-Kuusisto as an engineer on various utility and street projects in northeast Minnesota.

In 2008, Harold was hired by the City of Ely as its Operations Director to manage the combined positions of Utility

General Manager and Public Works superintendent. In this role Harold was responsible for the water, sewer, and electric utilities as well as the public works department, including streets, parks, and recreation.

In addition to these duties, since 2012, Harold has also taken on the duties of Clerk/Treasurer, and he is responsible for the city's finances and administrative functions. Harold has also served as a board member for Northeastern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency.

He has extensive experience in grant writing and participates actively in community development.

Harold is married to Lora, and



they have two daughters ages 13 and 16. Harold spends his free time mountain biking, fishing, and snowmobiling.

## Logan Davids joins MMUA



**Logan Davids has joined MMUA as a Regional Safety Coordinator.**

Logan's past experience includes time as a tree service expert, Electric Superintendent/Journeyman with Milford Municipal Utilities in Iowa, and as Zoning Administrator with the City of Wahpeton, Iowa.

Logan received his power lineman diploma from Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Jackson, Minnesota.

He is a journeyman lineman, holds a grade 1 water treatment license, and has a crane operator certification.

Logan lives in Milford, Iowa. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his wife Cassandra and his two kids, Braxton and Bria. He also enjoys playing pickleball and golfing.

Welcome to MMUA, Logan!

## Florida public utility head found guilty of illegal attempt to privatize

**On July 30, the former head of the Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA), a public utility based in Florida's state capital, was sentenced to four years in prison for his attempts to privatize the JEA.**

Aaron Zahn became CEO of the Authority in 2018. He tried to convince the board of directors the utility needed to privatize to survive. What was not known at the time was that Zahn had arranged for hidden payouts for

himself and other JEA executives if the utility was sold.

Zahn was convicted of wire fraud and conspiracy earlier this year.

# If you want to know, ask

**“The future belongs to the curious. The ones who are not afraid to try it, explore it, poke at it, question it and turn it inside out.”**  
—Eleanor Roosevelt

In 2011, *Time* magazine reported on a poll showing the superpower Americans would most like to have was tied between reading people’s minds and time travel.

For non-whites, women, and Gen-Xers, mind reading won handily.

While some people might wish to mind-read so they could win at poker or find out how low that car salesperson will go, I suspect the biggest reason for most people is more mundane. They just want to get things right and save time. They want to know up front whether to choose one course or another, whether someone is being honest with them, or why certain things seem to happen over and over.

Without the ability to read minds, it might seem like just asking people what they think is the best route to getting the information we need. If only it were that easy. Here’s a case in point.

“Gobsmacked” is probably too strong of a word, but it is in the neighborhood for how MMUA staff felt upon reading some of the Summer Conference survey responses this year. In Fargo, easily 95 percent of the feedback the staff and I received directly from attendees was highly complimentary. Folks liked the golf, the food, the speakers, and a host of other things. Sure, the hotel was a little long in the tooth, but it was okay. Sure, Fargo was an extended trip for some and a pleasurable short jaunt for others. Sure, the lakes area was missed, but doing something new was nice too.

Even knowing it wasn’t perfect, as a staff, we had every reason to feel good about the event when it wrapped up on August 21. The pats on the back and seemingly genuine appreciation we had received led us to believe we’d hit a solid triple. We thought we knew what we needed to do to address the areas of concern we’d heard about.

Then the largely anonymous survey feedback rolled in. It painted a different picture.

Attendees from utilities and joint action agencies were still more positive than not, but they were less

complimentary in the survey than they had been at the Summer Conference.

These attendees said things like, “It is always a good event with great speakers and breakout sessions to learn a lot, chances to reconnect with people you met the year prior and network with new people, think of new ideas, and to help you know about some new resources that can help you save time and money down the road.”

A few made suggestions and comments similar to things we heard in Fargo. Overall, the survey feedback from utility members felt more like an echo and clarification of what we had received there than a completely different report.

**Associate members—the vendors of goods and services who support the trade show and hospitality rooms—really let us have it.** “Too little benefit; not enough vendor-utility interaction for the cost ... Next year we will be sending a lot fewer people to this event.” There were other comments as well, some of them less stern, regarding the venue and perceptions of value. It is clear this group was not happy.

**Can we draw valid conclusions and chart a new course based on this data?** It has been suggested the feedback given to us in person was “Minnesota nice,” sugar-coated so as not to offend staff members the attendees truly appreciated. (The survey indicated 100 percent positive or neutral ratings for the staff.) Since the survey could be answered anonymously—providing your name was optional—one theory goes that we can only find attendees’ true feelings in the survey.

**Maybe, but it’s hard to say.** Certainly, the feelings expressed by the survey respondents are probably real, but here’s the deal. Around 280 non-staff people attended some part of the event. Only 57 of them (approximately 20 percent) completed the survey. Some of the 57 were pleased with the Summer Conference. About 39 percent of those were happy enough to be promoters in the future, ranking their satisfaction a nine or a 10 out of 10. Another 37 percent were neutral, ranking their satisfaction at seven or eight out of 10. Just 15 people—a bit over five percent of all attendees, but a

full 26 percent of survey respondents—were unhappy enough to be detractors, ranking their satisfaction at six or below. Those 15 people left comments that ranged from mildly irritated to seriously scathing.

Clearly, we have a problem. A vocal subgroup of our faithful members, particularly associate members, has strong feelings and wants change.

The challenges, though, are many:

- We don’t know how representative these 15 are of the entire 280 that were actually present.
- We don’t know how MMUA members who did not attend this year feel about the issues raised.
- We know there are misperceptions about some of the areas of heartburn, but we don’t know whether “facts” would change anyone’s feelings or decisions.
- It’s hard to read the tea leaves as to what would be a better solution, given the old fallback (“Let’s go back to the lakes!”) is not as feasible as it was in the past. To go back to the lakes would require tradeoffs including one or more of the following: moving the event out of the summertime period, using multiple resorts/venues that would either largely eliminate shared meals or drive prices up considerably higher, limiting the size of the trade show, limiting the number of regular member attendees, and/or limiting the number of learning tracks.

**The only dog MMUA staff has in the fight is getting this right for our members.** Absent the ability to read minds, how should we do that?

I recently stumbled upon a new book called *Ask*, by Jeff Wetzler. He offers a research-based approach to learning what others really think and feel. While employing it doesn’t mean you’ll gain superpower mind-reading skills, it does provide a way to truly learn what others want and need, so that your decisions can be better. In a nutshell, Wetzler suggests:

## From My Desk to Yours

**Karleen Kos**  
MMUA CEO



**1. Choosing curiosity:** This step encourages us to cultivate genuine interest in others’ thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. We go from asking because it is good manners or because the situation requires it to seeking new discoveries and using it to connect dots that previously could not be brought together.

In the case of MMUA, we need to ask a lot more people a lot of different questions to truly understand what our members want and need from their annual meeting. We also need to better understand what tradeoffs do and don’t matter. In particular, we need to understand how to align the priorities and tradeoffs that matter most to utility personnel with those that matter most to vendors.

**2. Making it safe:** To create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their true thoughts, it’s essential to foster the sense that they can speak their minds or expose vulnerabilities without concern. That’s why people with strong feelings tend to be so strident on social media and in anonymous surveys. They can put things “out there” with a minimal chance of the blowback that often occurs in person.

Wetzler offers strategies for making it more appealing for others to tell the truth, even about sensitive or challenging topics. This is summarized in something he calls the “safety cycle,” which involves creating connection, opening up about the feedback we need in a humble and mutually beneficial manner, and conveying a sense of, “We can handle the real truth.”

At MMUA, this is something I need to think about. Beyond the use of electronic surveys, we need to develop means of having actual conversations about the conference—both individually and in groups—in safe, structured,

transparent ways. We already do this with the safety services program, so we have some experience with it.

In these talks, we need enough unhurried time to dig deeper into our members’ needs and mine their thoughts about how we should balance competing preferences.

**3. Posing quality questions:** As someone involved in creating surveys and focus groups for many years, I have known for a while that the quality and clarity of the questions asked determines the usefulness of the responses received. In *Ask*, Wetzler suggests ways of posing questions that elicit “see what they see” responses, as opposed to trying to get people to see what you see. Asking things like, “What might I be missing?” or “What do you see as the downsides to [my proposal]?” provides a window into risks and holes in your own reasoning.

Another benefit of asking questions this way is people tend to highlight risks and downsides that will affect the things that really matter to them. They typically don’t bother to mention something they don’t care about.






MMUA usually includes open-ended survey and discussion questions to get at these concepts, though we can always improve. When we launch our triennial survey later this fall—and in future discussions and focus groups—we will make the pursuit of learning more about our blind spots standard operating procedure.

**4. Listening to learn:** Active listening is key to truly understanding what someone is trying to tell you and what they really want you to do about it. The step emphasizes listening with the intent to grow your understanding of the whole package: content, emotion, and action, rather than simply waiting for your turn to speak and persuade. Real breakthroughs come when we fully absorb what others are saying, and when we avoid “BS listening,”—the tendency to take discussions back to self,—short-circuits the goal of staying with the other person’s ideas and needs.

While MMUA can always do better, I am hopeful we already do a decent job of focusing on the needs of our members most of the time. We can, however, grow in what is known as AWE ques-

*Continued on page 5*



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# Madelia Municipal Light & Power

Continued from page 1

In response, MMLP embarked on a major project to build a new substation, aiming not only to address current issues but also to enhance the system's capacity and resilience. The construction process, which began in July 2021, faced various challenges, including supply chain delays and site preparation issues. Despite these hurdles, the team's adaptability and commitment ensured steady progress. "We switched engineers partway through the process, which initially slowed things down but ultimately accelerated our timeline," Trembley notes.

### Teamwork and innovation.

The project has been a significant learning experience for the MMLP team. With many team members taking on new roles and responsibilities, the dynamic has fostered collaboration and innovation. "We've had many firsts since 2019, and our team has come together with new viewpoints and ideas," Trembley says. "Each member brings something special, and our collective effort has driven the success of this project."

The new substation, located 300 feet east of the old facility, was strategically placed for ease of interconnection and cost efficiency. It is scheduled to commence operations in the fall, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony planned to celebrate the achievement with staff and contractors.

### Supporting the community.

MMLP's resilience extends beyond infrastructure. This summer, flooding impacted city amenities, necessitating power cuts to the park and campgrounds. "The river overflowed its banks, and unfortunately, the golf course's clubhouse was damaged," Trembley recounts. The city plans to rebuild the clubhouse in a more flood-resistant location, continuing its tradition of coming back better.

Madelia's history of recovery and improvement is evident in its response to past challenges. After a devastating downtown fire in 2016, the community rebuilt with enhanced structures, including LaPlaza Mexican Restaurant and Grocery as well as several businesses. In addition to these improvements, a larger and more efficient city hall, a modernized police department, and an expanded fire hall were constructed under one roof. The old city hall site now hosts a two-story complex with apartments and retail spaces. Together with ongoing investment in the electrical grid, these enhancements aim to bolster community services and ensure a thriving, well-equipped city, reflecting Madelia's ongoing commitment to progress.



In this image, from June 2023, the pad where the new transformer would be placed has been poured. The forms behind the pad are for the switchgear building, scheduled to arrive in July 2023.



This photo, from December 2023, captures several details: Manholes are positioned to the right, ready for placement. Footings are being poured for the north wall. A-frame foundations have been set in place. A recently installed PMH 9 switch sits near the fence next to a metering enclosure.

**The value of municipal utilities.** Reflecting on MMLP's role and the broader significance of municipal utilities, Trembley emphasizes the importance of

adaptability. "In this industry, we talk about resiliency, especially in today's world," he says. "The resilience of this town says a lot. Since December 1939, when

energy first flowed from two engines in this plant, MMLP has faced opposition and challenges but has continually improved. We have fostered community

growth and been part of the town's entire journey. I am proud to work with a great team in a great town and to be part of

Continued on page 5



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*Continued on page 5*



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## Madelia Municipal Light & Power

Continued from page 4



The most recent image of the new substation site is from August 2024. It shows significant progress. Transmission poles have been installed. The north wall has been completed. At this point, the project is nearly ready to energize but is currently on hold due to pending safety checks, primarily because the fencing needs to be completed.

something so historic.”

As Madelia Municipal Light & Power marks its 85th anniversary, its story of resilience, teamwork, and innovation is a testament to the city’s enduring spirit. With ongoing projects and a commitment to excellence,

MMLP continues to set a benchmark for progress and community support, ensuring that Madelia remains a model of growth and resilience.

## If you want to know, ask

Continued from page 3

tions, that is, “and what else?” In the hurriedness of most of our days, it is easy to stop when there’s a natural stopping place. It takes discipline to keep probing for “what else” and listening until we have reached the end of what a member has to share.

**5. Reflecting and reconnecting:** The final step Wetzler discusses involves reflecting on what you’ve learned and using those insights to guide future actions. This step is about closing the loop—taking what you’ve heard and turning it into meaningful change or desired action.

In MMUA’s case, we have decisions to make about the

specifics of the 2025 Summer Conference and about everything our annual meeting (whether in the summer or otherwise) should look like beyond that.

Due to the nature of large events, we are already committed to Rochester for 2025, and I am confident that our friends at Rochester Public Utilities, the Kahler Hotel, and a variety of other venues will bend over backwards to help us have a great time.

We need to make a decision about the 2026 meeting by the middle of Q2 in 2025. So over the next few months, we will be asking a lot of questions, both

old style and in Wetzler’s Ask style, so we can create a plan that best meets the needs of MMUA’s members and is something that almost everyone can live with.

In the end, all that matters to the staff and Board of MMUA—on the question of the conference or any other—is this: how can we best fulfill our vision of bringing value to municipal utilities? How can we best carry out our mission of unifying and supporting these critical teams across Minnesota and the Midwest? As Eleanor Roosevelt said, we will remain curious and unafraid of the answers. We will ask.

## Washington State ballot initiative to challenge state’s pivot away from natural gas

**On July 24, Washington election officials certified that Initiative 2066 will appear on the November 2024 ballot.**

The ballot initiative would require local governments and utilities to provide natural gas to eligible customers, work to prevent exorbitant rate hikes being used to encourage elimination of

gas as a fuel source, and prohibit environmental agencies from penalizing the use of gas.

The move comes in response to new legislative actions in Washington that were signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee in March. The laws encourage consumers and utilities to move away from the use of natural gas by slowly phasing out rebates for natural

gas equipment and creating a pathway to clean energy in the state. Opponents of the initiative noted there is no current or future natural gas ban in the Washington State.

The initiative is being backed by the Building Industry Association of Washington and the Associated General Contractors, among others.

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## 'Public Perceptions of Tap Water' survey provides insights for water operators

The results of the American Water Works Association *Public Perceptions of Tap Water* survey results were released in late summer, giving industry experts an interesting look at how the public views their tap water and the people who help produce it.

The survey was conducted from May 1–7, 2024, with a sample size of 2,010 consumers.

Local water utilities were the most trusted source for information about the local water supply, at 70 percent. Scientists and local government followed, at 68 percent and 59 percent, respectively.

About 72 percent of respondents view their home water supply as safe. Some 60 percent of respondents also rated their



home water as being of an excellent or good quality.

Communication from local utilities was also found to be important, as citizens who have

received recent water information from their local water utility are three times more likely to believe that their water safety has improved over the past five years, compared to those who hadn't received such information.

The surveys also found that 34 percent of respondents said they struggled to pay their water bills on time. Because of the value placed on water in general, 77 percent of respondents said they would support a federal assistance program for paying for a family's water.

This information provides important insights for water operators and policymakers, including that Americans value their water and are generally satisfied with its quality and safety.

## Georgia's Vogtle 2 Nuclear Power Plant experiences fire event



On August 13, a transformer fire started at Plant Vogtle in Georgia, putting the plant into alert status for just over two hours.

The fire was extinguished quickly, but officials say that the fire could have affected the electrical supply for heating and cooling in Vogtle 2's control room.

Throughout the event, the nuclear plant continued to operate normally. The fire's cause will be investigated by the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission.



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## American households rake in \$8.4 billion in tax credits while increasing energy efficiency



A press release issued by the United States Department of the Treasury on August 7 noted that on the second anniversary of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), 3.4 million families had collected \$8.4 billion in tax credits for clean energy and energy efficiency upgrades in 2023.

An estimated \$6 billion in clean energy and efficiency tax credits were claimed on Americans' 2023 tax returns. More

than 750,000 families claimed tax credits for residential solar electricity, more than 100,000 families claimed credits for heat pump water heaters, and almost 700,000 families claimed credits for insulation and air sealing in their homes.

These investments will pay for themselves many times over as American families pay less for energy costs and create lower environmental impacts.

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## Nebraska moves forward on studies to implement small modular reactors

On August 8, the Nebraska Public Power District and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development announced the next phase of a study that will take its shortlist of 16 sites for small modular reactors (SMRs) down to just two to four sites.

SMRs are considered the next wave of nuclear reactors, taking up less space, needing smaller

financial investments, and taking less time to build. The next phase of the study will include technical analysis and discussions with local communities about their interest in hosting an SMR.

Most of the current 16 sites are in the south-central and southeast parts of Nebraska.

## Walz for Vice President

Continued from page 1

To fill a vacancy in the office of Lieutenant Governor, the President of the Minnesota Senate automatically and immediately becomes Lieutenant Governor. If this sounds familiar, it is because it is the scenario that occurred when then Governor Dayton appointed then Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith to an open U.S. Senate seat. In fact, it is the unfinished legal business from that appointment that renders it politically risky for Governor Walz to resign prematurely.

As you may recall, when then President of the Senate Michelle Fischbach became Lieutenant Governor upon Governor Dayton's appointment of Tina Smith to the U.S. Senate, she argued that she could hold both jobs simultaneously, a position taken primarily to protect the Republican majority that existed in the Minnesota Senate at that time. There is also an old attorney general's opinion that supported the claim.

Senate Democrats supported a legal challenge to this interpretation, pointing out that the State's Constitution had been amended in 1972 to expressly prohibit holding two elected offices at the same time. The trial judge dismissed the first lawsuit, finding that it was premature because Lieutenant Governor Fischbach had not yet performed the duties of both offices. But after she had

clearly performed duties of both offices, the DFL withdrew its support of the legal challenges, and after the legislative session adjourned, Michelle Fischbach resigned her Senate seat, rendering the issue moot. Thus, no formal court ruling was ever entered as to whether one person can serve as both Lieutenant Governor and State Senator at the same time.

Returning to the present, if Walz were to resign, Peggy Flanagan would become Governor and Bobby Joe Champion, the current President of the Senate, would become Lieutenant Governor. If Senator Champion were forced to give up his senate seat upon becoming Lieutenant Governor, the 33-33 tie would become a 33-32 Republican majority in the short term. If the DFL were to win the special election to fill the Morrison seat, the result would be another 33-33 tie until the vacated Champion seat is also filled. The Morrison seat is in a DFL-leaning district. Senator Champion's district is a very strong Democratic district.

If the Republicans were to win the vacant Morrison seat, they would gain a 34-32 majority if the Champion seat is deemed vacated and would retain a 34-33 majority if the DFL were to hold the Champion seat when it is filled by special election, or if the courts were to find that Champion could serve in both offices.

But strange things happen in special elections. If a third-party candidate or an independent wins the Morrison seat, at the start of the 2025 session we could be looking at a 33-33-1 split if Champion is allowed to hold both offices, or a 33-32-1 split with a vacancy and a Republican plurality if not. If the DFL holds the Champion seat in a special election, a 33-33-1 division would be restored, but if a surprise third-party or independent candidate should prevail, a 33-32-2 Republican plurality would again be the result.

The lack of even a one-vote true majority could make it very difficult to even organize the Senate and appoint committees and leaders. This doesn't even begin to cover the challenges of actually governing in a year with a mandate to adopt a new biennial budget. To add to the uncertainty, none of the above scenarios deal with the situation presented by Senator Mitchell's legal situation, which if unresolved by the start of the 2025 session could see floor debates like those at the end of the 2024 legislative session. If Senator Mitchell's woes are resolved in a manner creating another vacancy in a DFL leaning but not totally safe district, which party ultimately controls the Minnesota Senate may truly be up for debate.

Stay tuned.

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## Interconnection Corner: Interconnection Costs

By Bill Black

**Under the Minnesota Municipal Interconnection Process (M-MIP), customers interconnecting distributed energy resources (DER) are required to pay the utility's costs if any distribution upgrades are necessary to accommodate the DER.**

They also must pay for the utility's cost to commission the DER system.

Under the M-MIP's Simplified Process, an estimate of these costs must be stated in the Uniform Contract. The utility should deliver the final cost invoice to the customer within thirty (30) business days after commissioning, or upon waiving the commissioning requirement. The customer must make payment within twenty-one (21) business days, or as otherwise written in the contract.

Under the Fast Track Process or Study Process, the estimated costs should be itemized in detail in Attachment 2 of the Minnesota Municipal Interconnection Agreement (MMIA). The utility should deliver the final



interconnection cost accounting to the customer within eighty-one (81) business days after completing construction and installation of interconnection-related upgrades. The utility should then bill the customer on a monthly basis or other basis agreed to in the MMIA. The customer must pay on each invoice within twenty-one (21) business days, or as otherwise agreed to in the MMIA.

In its 2024 session, the Minnesota legislature passed a law requiring the Public Utilities Commission to develop an interconnection cost allocation method to spread utility costs for individual interconnection

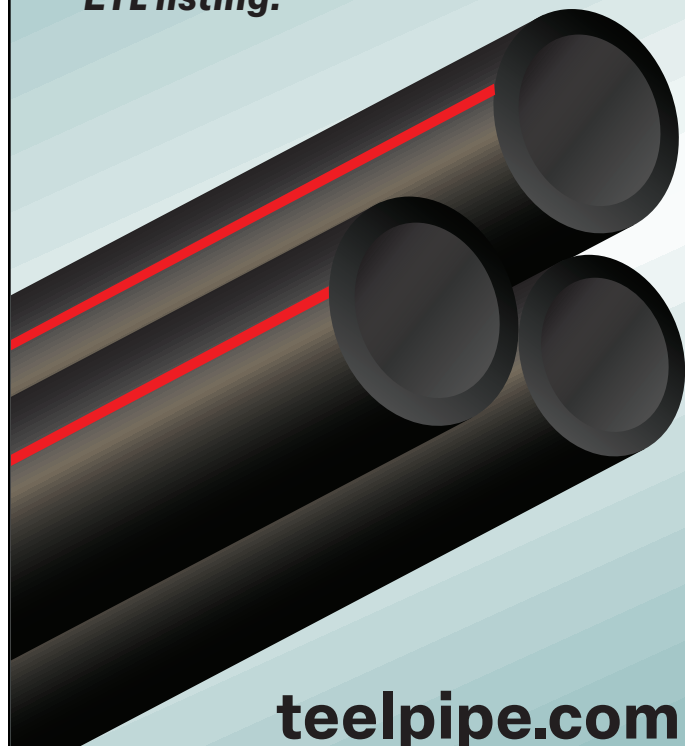
upgrade costs among existing and future interconnecting customers who would benefit from them. However, municipal and cooperative utilities would not be subject to the Commission's resulting order. For them, the initial cost causer remains responsible, unless the utility adopts the Commission's method or other policy requiring different action.

The information above comes from Minnesota Municipal Interconnection Process (M-MIP) Booklet #2 Simplified Process, p. 9-10, and Booklet #3 Fast Track Process, p. 16. The full M-MIP can be found at <https://www.mmua.org/industry-library>.

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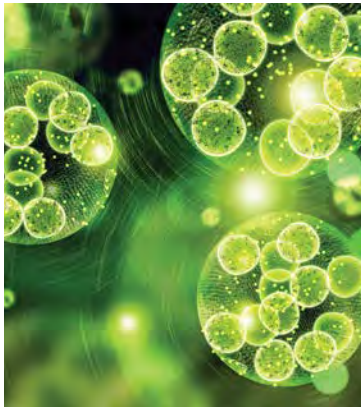
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## Algae may be a solar panel ingredient of the future

Research at Concordia University in Montreal has found that photosynthesis, or the process through which plants turn light energy into chemical energy, can also be used to create electricity.

While examining the photosynthesis processes of algae, scientists realized that algae released an electron when the organism took in light energy.

This led the researchers to wonder how they could catch the electrons and use them. They created a space where the algae could live in electrical microcells,



where electrodes could capture the electrons as they were produced and use them to generate electricity.

The microcells are only about one inch by one inch, and can be attached to each other, or stacked to generate even more electricity. Algae microcells do not have to be directly exposed to sunlight to generate electricity, giving it an advantage over today's solar cells.

Another advantage is the algae panels can release electrons and therefore produce electricity at night due to their unique chemical processes.

The researchers plan to devote more time to this breakthrough so they can eventually bring this new technology to market.

## Minnesota Power receives PUC's approval for \$1 billion power line rebuild

On August 1, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved Minnesota Power's (MP) plans to modernize its 465-mile Square Butte line, which runs from North Dakota to Hermantown in northeastern Minnesota.



carbon free by 2030.

MP has received a \$50 million federal grant for the project, as well as \$15 million in state funding. Most of the remaining costs will be paid by MP's customers.

The line upgrades are expected to be in service between 2028 and 2030.

The upgrade will carry up to 60 percent more capacity than today, allowing MP to transmit North Dakota wind power to its customers in northern Minnesota. The line rebuild will help MP reach its goal of being 80 percent

## Schwarzenegger touts nuclear power



Speaking at the Austrian World Summit in Vienna, Arnold Schwarzenegger highlighted his interest in using nuclear generation to provide baseload power as renewable energy continues to ramp up.

He criticized Germany for shutting down all of their nuclear generation in 2023, while still having ambitious clean energy goals.

In contrast, he lauded the wisdom of the federal government in the United States, which is looking at closed nuclear power plants and examining whether they should be reopened. Schwarzenegger noted the example of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant in California, which is currently being examined for continued operation.

Research from a 2021 report said keeping Diablo Canyon running until 2035 significantly reduce California's carbon emissions from electricity generation by 11 percent every year and save the state \$2.6 billion.

Schwarzenegger acknowledged that many of these decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis, but that erring in favor of clean, affordable energy is often the best choice.



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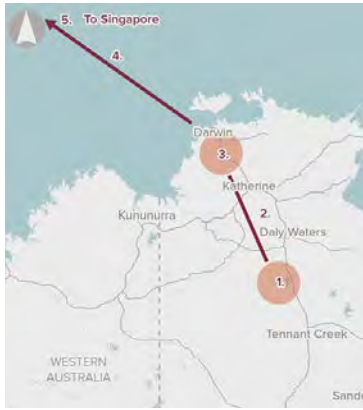
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## Underwater transmission line will provide Australian solar power to Asia

On July 16, Australian renewable energy company SunCable announced they would be building a project called the Australia-Asia Powerlink to connect new Australian solar farms to Singapore in Asia, a distance of 2,671 miles.

The project will provide about 15 percent of Singapore's electricity needs, or about 1.75 gigawatts (GW) of power. The power will



be provided by 17-20 GW capacity worth of solar farms in the Northern Territory of Australia. The farms will also provide 800 megawatts of electricity to the Darwin region of Australia.

The project is part of a larger effort that SunCable pictures in the coming years, which would include mineral mining, hydrogen production, green fuels, and data centers in the Northern Territory of Australia.

## Scientists achieve world record for fiber optic transmission speeds

Researchers at Aston University in the United Kingdom have achieved a new world record for fiber optic transmission speeds—a whopping 402 terabits per second (Tbps).



The record was set by using six wavelength bands to send data, which had never been done before. The previous record, set in March 2024, used four of the six wavelength bands to send information, and that process reached speeds of 301 Tbps.

Most current broadband uses only the C-band and L-band, which are just two of the six wavelength bands. The speed difference between normal broadband and this world record

are stark: 402 Tbps is 1.6 million times faster than current average broadband speeds.

These breakthroughs will allow networks to become faster and continue to operate well, even when they reach levels of network congestion that would slow current fiber optic networks.



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# Summer Conference



Chris Watkins from the Minnesota Department of Commerce helped lead a group through a cybersecurity tabletop during the preconference workshop.



Incoming MMUA Board President Scott Grabe of Staples (at far left) enjoyed golfing with Jeff Holsen, Connor Kerr, and Darin Grosz from Elbow Lake.



Scott Corwin, President and CEO of APPA, gave the opening keynote on the state of play in the public power world and how to navigate future events in the industry.



The roundtables explored a number of interesting utility topics in-depth.



Ursula Schryver of APPA speaks with a full house on protecting your utility from a buyout or sellout.



Mary Hodson from the Hutchinson Chamber and Visitors Bureau, Andrea Moore from Hutchinson Public Schools, and Hutchinson Economic Development Director Miles Seppelt described TigerPath, a new way to get students into careers and help solve workforce issues.



MMUA treasurer Pete Moulton provided the membership with a highly favorable financial report for FY 2022-23 at the annual business meeting.



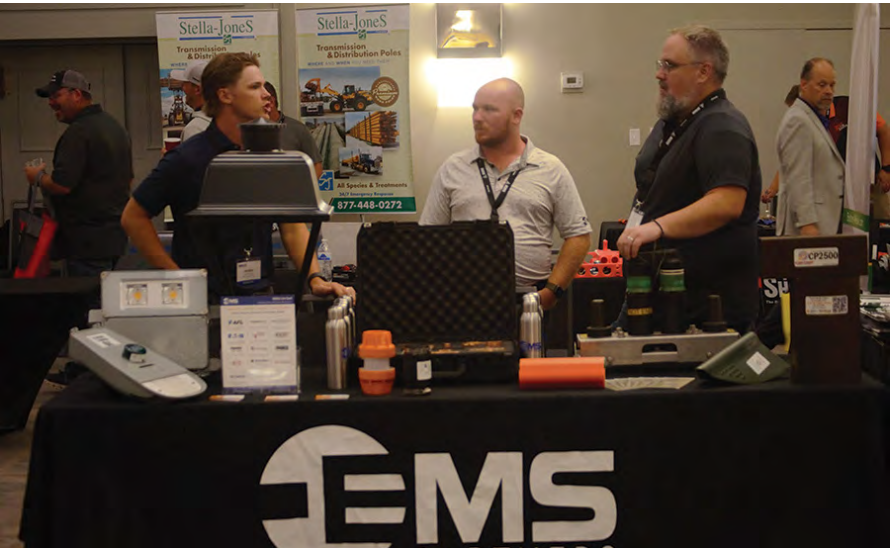
At the annual Awards Banquet, President Julie Kennedy handed the gavel over to Scott Grabe, who began his term at the close of the annual business meeting on Wednesday. He, in turn, presented her with a clock commemorating her time as MMUA's leader.



Mark Weaver of Communications Counsel, Inc., shared how to respond in a crisis situation at your utility.



Kent Sulem of MMUA informed members about the Association's work in St. Paul.



EMS was one of many vendors sharing the products and meeting members at the trade show.



Staff from Core & Main, one of MMUA's annual gold-level sponsors, speak to prospective customers.



The hospitality rooms were busy the night after the trade show. Members are always appreciative when companies like EMS and Frontier Energy go the extra mile and sponsor these rooms, facilitating quality networking long after the official agenda is over.



Attendees dive into water/wastewater topics, including the latest information about PFAS mitigation, during topical learning tracks on Wednesday morning.



Jon Colby, an expert on improv, mugged for the camera before his closing keynote presentation as Mike Willetts makes sure everything is just right.



Jon's session got conferencegoers on their feet as they learned about working together and thinking creatively through improv.

## Summer Conference

Continued from page 1

Then it was off to the golf course and the trail hike. This year's golf event was held at The Meadows, a beautiful municipal course in Moorhead. The day's temperatures were in the low 80s and conditions were pleasant, leading many golfers to say good things about the course. The winners of the golf tournament scramble were as follows:

- 1st Place Team: Greg Drent of Shakopee, Dave Hunstad of Hutchinson, Jordan Rykal of EMS Partners, and Ethan Sweet of Border States.
- 2nd Place Team: Logan Brummer, Cory Kiemele, and Morgan Rask of Border States and Zack Schommer of EMS Partners.
- 3rd Place Team: Scott Grabe of Staples; and Darin Grosz, Jeff Holsen, and Connor Kerr of Elbow Lake.

The longest drive contest was won by Mark Leaf of Stella Jones, the closest to the pin contest was won by John Kinsman of Thief River Falls, and the putting contest was won by Vincent Findley of American Electric Power Energy.

Meanwhile, Mike Willetts led the trail hike at the Fargo/Tricom bike path, which attracted

non-golfers and former golfers who wanted to enjoy the beautiful day without chasing a small white ball.

The evening of August 19 brought the welcome reception. Attendees enjoyed each other's company and food and drink in the Sterling/Crowne Ballroom. For those who wanted to stay out late and network a little longer, poolside hospitality rooms continued for hours after the reception ended.

Tuesday, August 20 was the biggest day of the event. Julie Kennedy, MMUA Board President, welcomed attendees in the morning, as did MMUA CEO Karleen Kos. The keynote address was delivered by Scott Corwin, CEO of the American Public Power Association (APPA). Scott spoke about what APPA has been doing on many fronts. He covered four main areas in which APPA is working: advocacy, education and training, security and resilience, and collaboration and financial strength. Scott noted that APPA's members are best in the country from a reliability standpoint and that they intend to protect their critical load by looking at resources such as hydropower and nuclear more closely.

The roundtable discussion sessions followed, with presenters talking with attendees on a

variety of timely issues, and attendees sharing their own experiences with these operational concerns. Some of the topics covered included human resources, grant-seeking and administration, natural gas infrastructure, complying with the Davis-Bacon Act, system resiliency, and many other areas. Attendees were impressed with the amount of expertise displayed during this session.

After a refreshment break, Ursula Schryver of APPA gave an extremely informative and detailed presentation on how to prevent a buyout or sellout at your utility. By sharing case studies and examples of the strategies that investor-owned utilities use to acquire public utilities, Schryver gave attendees methods of countering these activities and building better understanding of utility value in your community.

Miles Seppelt, Andrea Moore, and Mary Hodson from Hutchinson then took the stage. They detailed their community's success with TigerPath, a workforce development program they have pioneered. TigerPath allows students to explore four different career tracks to learn about what they love, and then explore those areas in high school. As a manufacturing city, Hutchinson has used the program to guide

students into local manufacturers, providing well-paying jobs to young people while keeping the city's economy booming. Hutchinson Public Utilities has also been involved in TigerPath, providing high school students with a look at jobs in the utility sector.

At the 2024 MMUA Awards Luncheon, attendees enjoyed a delicious lunch while the Association conferred some seven awards to amazing people from around the state. You can learn more in the awards story on page 14. MMUA President Julie Kennedy of Grand Rapids Public Utilities also passed the gavel to incoming President Scott Grabe, Public Works Director for the City of Staples.

The afternoon sessions began with a compelling talk by Julie Kennedy, General Manager of Grand Rapids Public Utilities, and Chad Seidel of Corona Environmental Consulting. The pair spoke about managing public perceptions during a utilities crisis. In this case, Grand Rapids Public Utilities had to deal with a Legionnaires' outbreak that was allegedly caused by the city's municipal water supply. Julie and Chad emphasized the importance of preparing proactively for crises and developing relationships prior to them so that people know you

are dealing in good faith. As an event unfolds, it is crucial to communicate in many ways to reach community members and get ahead of negative publicity from outsiders.

To drive home these points, the next speaker was Mark Weaver, an expert in crisis communications. Weaver said three people are needed at your decision-making table during a crisis: a lawyer, a press person, and a subject matter expert. These people need to listen, act quickly, be transparent, and do the right thing. The person who talks to the press during a crisis needs to be competent, credible, and caring for communications to be strong. Weaver also discussed the importance of getting your message out there in a non-damaging way, even if internal teams don't want to speak about the crisis.

The afternoon wrapped up with a legislative update. Kent Sulem and Michael Nolan spoke about the state and federal dynamics that are affecting MMUA's public policy goals. Both emphasized the small majorities seen in St. Paul and Washington, D.C., and how a small swing in either direction could lead to changes in the legislative cycles ahead. These could include things such as

Continued on page 13



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## Summer Conference

Continued from page 12

changes in federal funding levels, altered regulations, and permitting reform.

As the day's educational agenda ended, the trade show got underway. Vendors from dozens of companies filled the Sterling/Crowne Ballroom and the Holiday Inn's Holidome. Great conversations and relationships were formed and renewed as attendees discussed the year's upcoming projects and how vendors could help them get where they wanted to go.

Wednesday, August 21 was the last day of the conference, and it began with MMUA's annual business meeting for members. The business meeting addressed ways in which the Association is moving forward, with new programs, grant assistance for members, new office space, and a new website. The membership approved the Board-recommended dues structure for 2025, and also voted to approve new board members Harold Langowski from Ely and Tim Stoner from Blue Earth. Keith Butcher from Princeton, who has been filling in a partial

Board term, was also elected to his own first three-year term, and Jay Lutz from Austin was elected to complete the one year remaining on a term vacated in April due to Don Martodam's retirement from Hawley's Public Utilities Commission. Scott Grabe became MMUA's President for the coming year, with Pete Moulton voted President-elect. Members also voted to expand the Board to 12 members and extend the terms of Moulton and Jeremy Carter to better facilitate compliance with rotation requirements in MMUA's bylaws.

Groups then went to their learning tracks, which featured information on the topics of electric utilities, water/wastewater utilities, leadership, and governance. Conferencegoers were able to learn from experts in their fields about topics such as transmission planning, municipal solar projects, Minnesota's blueprint for PFAS, and legal issues related to public communications.

The closing keynote was given by Jon Colby, an improvisation

expert who taught the crowd about how to use improv to make our lives and jobs better. He touched on ways to implement behaviors such as being fully present, using a "yes and" approach to ideas, taking time to calm down, and setting boundaries to be more productive.

Colby got attendees up on their feet to test the limits of their memories and creativity with group improv activities. His presentation was a fun and thought-provoking conclusion to the conference's program. After closing comments from MMUA CEO Karleen Kos, the Summer Conference drew to a close.

The 2024 MMUA Summer Conference had the theme of "Stronger Together." As attendees saw at the conference, the innovative work of public utilities on a local, state, and federal level is truly making us stronger as we share ideas, collaborate with one another, and pursue goals we hold in common. The conference showed that even with the challenges of change, the future is bright for hometown utilities in Minnesota.

## Scientists create solar panel that can generate electricity at night



Research published in the journal *Applied Physics Letters* in late July revealed that engineers at Stanford University had created a new type of solar cell that can create electricity at night.

By using a thermoelectric generator, the panels are able to harvest electricity from

the temperature differential between the panel and the surrounding air. This can provide power to residents at night as well as during the day.

This discovery will be of particular use to electricity users who are off the grid or don't have access to alternative forms of power generation.

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## California PUC proposes state procurement of offshore wind capacity



A proposal made by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on July 19 argues that the State of California should begin engaging in the centralized procurement of offshore wind capacity.

The proposition said that up to 7.6 gigawatts (GW) of capacity should be procured, with the goal of having all of the capacity operational by 2037.

The proposal would make procurement of offshore wind a state policy, driving the development of offshore wind off California's coast. The proposal also included recommendations for the addition of 1 GW of enhanced geothermal and 2 GW of long-duration energy storage.

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**Thank you!**

# MMUA honors excellence at its 2024 awards ceremony

On August 20, the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) awarded its highest honors at the 2024 Summer Conference.

These awards reflect the best of municipal utilities in the State of Minnesota.

The Association conferred two **Rising Star Awards** this year. The designation recognizes a future leader who has demonstrated a dedication to the goals and principles of municipal utilities through problem solving, creativity, and job knowledge.

Those honored include Caleb Scheel, Meter Service Worker and AMI Specialist at Owatonna Public Utilities.

Caleb first joined Owatonna Public Utilities in June of 2020. Since that time, his curiosity has led him to greatly expand his knowledge of metering and AMI through education and training. He has helped improve the accuracy of metering at Owatonna Public Utilities and has become an AMI expert. He has already received an associate's degree in Electric Power Technology, and in December of 2024, he will receive his bachelor's degree in Energy Management from Bismarck State College.

The second Rising Star award went to Kelley Willemssen, Director of Finance and Administration at Shakopee Public Utilities. Kelley joined Shakopee Public Utilities in 2016 as Customer Service Coordinator. Her strengths in budgeting, audits, and financial reporting made her a natural fit to take over as Director of Finance and Administration after the retirement of her predecessor in 2020. Kelley's care for the financial health of SPU has been reflected in her implementation of a new finance and billing platform and three clean audits since taking over the role. Kelley is also in the process of earning a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in data analytics.

MMUA named Lee Steinbrecher, Princeton, its **Community Service Award** winner for 2024. This award is given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

When Princeton Public Utilities was threatened with abolishment by referendum a few years ago, Lee leapt into action. He started a grassroots campaign called "Save Princeton Public Utilities." He printed yard signs, answered questions, and helped clear up misunderstandings and concerns. Thanks to his work and the work of others, the utility was saved, and Princeton Public Utilities continues to provide inexpensive, local power to Princeton.

Unable to attend the awards ceremony due to ill health, Lee



Caleb Scheel of Owatonna Public Utilities won the Rising Star Award.



Kelley Willemssen of Shakopee Public Utilities won the second Rising Star Award.



Lee Steinbrecher of Princeton won the Community Service Award.



Tom Kuntz of Owatonna won the Public Service Award.



Doug Carnival won the Honorary Lifetime Member award.



Keven Maxa of Austin Utilities won the Distinguished Service Award.

passed away on August 21, 2024. His death was noted in the *Princeton Union-Times*, where he was remembered by the community as a servant-leader. Lee was active in his community in many ways, from being a past member of the Princeton Planning Commission and Princeton City Council, to taking care of the city's flower boxes and pots.

The Princeton Public Utilities Commission had this to say about Lee: "The Commission was fortunate to receive the award earlier this month, so we met with Lee privately to present it to him in person. We were all sad to hear of his passing. Our condolences go out to the Steinbrecher family. Lee gave selflessly to the Princeton community, and this award was a small token of our appreciation

for his lifetime of service."

The Association conferred its **Public Service Award** on Tom Kuntz of Owatonna. This award is given to a local, state, or federal elected or appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.

Tom has demonstrated exemplary public service for more than 50 years to his community and public power. Tom worked for Owatonna Public Utilities (OPU) from 1971 to 2003, rising through the ranks from meter reader to General Manager of OPU until his retirement in 2003. From 2004 to the present, Tom has served as Mayor of Owatonna, while continuing to be a tireless advocate for public power. He has attended the APPA Legislative Conference annually since 1998 and has



Greg French of Virginia Public Utilities won the President's Award.

served on the APPA Public Policymakers Council. Tom has been a strong advocate for his city in innumerable ways, making his city and hometown utility

stronger.

MMUA named Doug Carnival, formerly of Carnival of McGrann Shea Carnival Straughn & Lamb, an **Honorary Lifetime Member** of the

*Continued on page 15*

## MMUA Honors Excellence

Continued from page 14

Association. This prestigious award symbolizes a long professional life dedicated not only to the advancement of municipal utilities locally, but also to the betterment of the industry on a statewide basis.

Doug provided nearly 40 years of service to MMUA and its members through his work as a contract lobbyist for the Association. Doug became a familiar and trusted face to legislators as he monitored bills and advocated for public power at the legislature. His commentaries at MMUA's conferences and work with MMUA's members have helped keep the Association in

front of emerging issues and addressing areas of concern. Doug has been a critical member of the MMUA Government Relations Team and will be much missed.

The Association conferred the **Distinguished Service Award** on Keven Maxa, Engineering Supervisor at Austin Municipal Utilities. The Distinguished Service Award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of MMUA and its goals.

Keven has been an important voice for municipal utilities as the single municipal utility stakeholder in meetings of the

Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety. In these meetings, he has helped advocate for rules that make utility operations safe while limiting detrimental changes. In 2024, Keven helped fend off excavation law changes that would have been negative for many utilities in Minnesota. His expertise and wisdom have been a boon to utilities across the state.

Julie Kennedy, Grand Rapids Public Utilities and MMUA's 2023-24 President, named Greg French, General Manager of Virginia Public Utilities, the 2024 recipient of the MMUA **President's Award**. This honor,

determined by the Association President, designates an individual who has provided significant assistance to the Association and its President. Julie stated:

"Greg urged me, in all his subtlety—through a Board nomination—to engage more deeply with MMUA. His action, which resulted in my becoming an MMUA Board member, has helped me more than anything else in my past eight years as General Manager at Grand Rapids Public Utilities. Whether from MMUA staff or fellow utility members, I've been guided on service territory acquisition negotiations, legislative initia-



tives, leadership development, strategic planning, crisis communications, mutual aid...this list goes on and on."

MMUA congratulates all of the award winners and thanks them for the amazing things they have done in support of public utilities in the State of Minnesota.

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## Senators introduce permitting reform legislation



**On July 22, Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and John Barrasso of Wyoming introduced permitting reform legislation in the Energy Permitting Reform Act of 2024.**

The act is notable in that it would allow the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to speed up permitting by single-handedly approving transmission projects that are of national importance.

The bill would also compel FERC to create an upgraded rule on transmission planning to guide the permitting process.

It is unlikely the bill will be passed this year, given the current political dynamics in Washington. However, it is clear that permitting reform's importance is rising as the need for transmission to service the United States' growing renewable energy infrastructure increases.

The bill has already garnered support from organizations like the American Clean Power Association and the American Council on Renewable Energy.

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## Chinese researchers create “meltdown-proof” nuclear reactor

Scientists at China's Tsinghua University have created a pair of nuclear reactors that are meltdown-proof, opening a new chapter in the development of nuclear power.

The reactor works by using helium gas for cooling, in contrast to the usual water. For fuel, the reactor uses graphite spheres that are filled with uranium. When used together, the fuel and cooling media are able to avoid a meltdown by naturally slowing their reaction as temperatures increase. This makes a meltdown impossible.

Separately, helium and



graphite are also able to naturally cool themselves, making high temperatures unlikely. These materials are able to reach 1742 degrees Fahrenheit without melting.

The test reactors can generate 105 megawatts of power each. The scientist will now scale up the reactors in a quest to make this technology commercially viable.

## First vehicle-to-home virtual power plant starts operation in Maryland

Solar and storage company Sunrun has created the first systematic vehicle-to-home virtual power plant (VPP) in Maryland, with the help of funding from the United States Department of Energy (DOE).

In partnership with Baltimore Gas and Electric Company, the initiative is using three customers who own Ford F-150 Lightnings, a Ford Charge Station, and home integration systems sold by Sunrun. From June 1 to September 30, the trucks are sharing stored energy from 5 to 9 pm on weekdays. The vehicle



owners will be compensated for supporting the grid at a time when it needs power the most.

In a statement, Sunrun CEO Mary Powell said, “This program is a significant proof of concept—no other market player has done this—and the goal is to expand

these programs all around the country. This exciting partnership lays the foundation for the power grid of the future where electric vehicle owners can contribute to grid resiliency and utility price stability for everyone.”

## EIA report sees natural gas prices fall to record lows

A report issued by the United States Energy Information Administration (EIA) on July 22 noted that wholesale natural gas spot prices had fallen to record lows in the first half of 2024.

Prices in March 2024 reached \$1.49/million British thermal units (MMBtu), which was the lowest monthly price since 1997. Prices from February to April 2024 were also the lowest prices ever seen for these months.

Natural gas prices have rebounded from their late-winter lull, but they still sit at the low value of \$2.56/MMBtu in June of 2024.

The EIA said that these low prices are a consequence of record production and low consumption (especially in the abnormally warm winter of 2023–2024).

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## Court of Appeals upholds Biden administration coal power plant rules

On July 19, a three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia unanimously ruled that the Biden administration's coal-fired power plant rules can stand, for the time being.

The rules, which were announced in April 2024, said that coal-fired power plants planning

to operate past 2039 would have to capture 90 percent of carbon emissions by 2032. Coal plants closing before 2032 are exempt from the rules.

The rules still face other upcoming legal challenges, with some parties threatening to seek an emergency stay of the rules from the Supreme Court.

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**Austin Utilities** issued a peak alert warning on July 29 due to hot weather. Customers were asked to reduce their energy usage until 8 pm.



**Blue Earth County** officials met in mid-August for a work session with Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management to discuss options for the Rapidan Dam and County Highway Bridge 9, which were affected by recent flooding. An analysis of the dam will be done by a consultant and then reviewed by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). The bridge will not receive funding from FEMA, but its outcome will depend on what happens to the dam. On August 24, the Blue Earth County Board decided the Rapidan Dam will be removed, and the County Highway Bridge 9 will be replaced.

The Dam Store, which was demolished by Blue Earth County after the partial failure of the Rapidan Dam, will reopen at a temporary location in **Mankato**.



A strong storm hit **Detroit Lakes** on July 30, causing damage to the Budget Host Inn and the high school. Outages were reported at many local businesses. Detroit Lakes Public Utilities worked to restore power after the weather event.

On August 12, the **Moorhead School Board** voted to place a capital project levy on the November 5 ballot. The levy will be about \$4.3 million annually for 10 years, and the funds will be used to upgrade school buildings, safety, and educational technology.



On July 22, the City of **Moorhead** approved a voucher from the Department of Energy's block grant program that will provide more than \$76,000 to purchase and install light-emitting diode

(LED) light bulbs for streetlights in the city.

**Mora** is planning to change its organizational structure so the city administrator/utilities general manager position will be separated into two distinct roles. The growth of **Mora Municipal Utilities** has led the city to identify this change as the best path forward for the community.

**Owatonna** hosted a trench rescue training class in early August. Members of Faribault Fire, Medford Fire, Mankato Fire, Winona Fire, Safety and Security



Consultation Specialists, and **Owatonna Public Utilities** attended the training.

On August 27, **New Ulm's** Public Utilities Commission approved a water system repair for well 27 and an overhaul of well 23. The failures and repairs will not affect the people of New Ulm as the city has a sufficient buffer between its water supply and the city's needs.





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On July 16, Deir al-Balah municipality in Gaza announced that wastewater pumping stations in the municipality have stopped working and some 700,000 people could be at risk of disease due to the failure.

On July 22, Portugal's new energy and climate plan said the country plans to raise its level of renewable energy in power production to 93 percent by 2030.



In late July, royal officials in Great Britain announced King Charles had installed solar panels at Windsor Castle, and he plans to convert the British Royal Family's Bentley limousines to biofuel.

According to the International Energy Agency, worldwide coal demand is set to be largely flat through the end of 2025.

An estimated 675,000 low- and moderate-income households in Washington State qualified for a \$200 electricity credit in the summer of 2024. The credit is being funded through Washington's landmark Climate Commitment Act.

The Wall Street Journal reported on August 5 that electricity bills in parts of California have doubled in two years as utility companies simultaneously improve infrastructure, attempt to mitigate wildfires, and move to renewable energy. These capital investments, complicated by extreme heat and drought conditions, have caused sharp electricity bill increases for the average Californian and provide a window into what can happen if the evolution to renewables is not properly paced.

Father Hennepin State Park in Mille Lacs County closed to the public on September 3 for replacement of the park's wastewater system. The project will upgrade the system, which will be designed to be better able to handle severe weather events. The system will also connect to the nearby city of Isle's municipal wastewater system.

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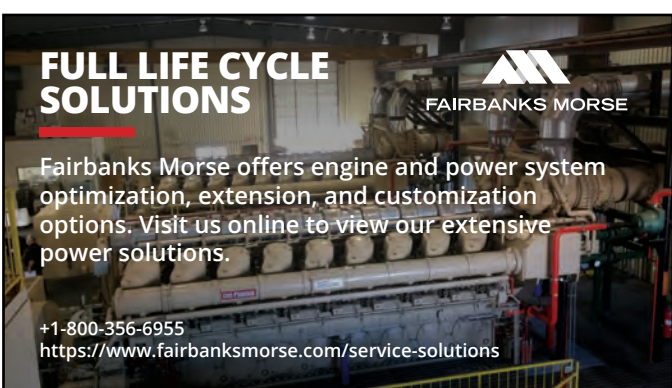
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Egyptian Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy Mahmoud Esmat met with Regional President of the European Investment Bank Guido Clary in early August to discuss ways that they could support each other in the areas of electrical interconnection and renewable energy projects.

Vietnam is planning to subsidize electricity prices for its electric vehicle (EV) charging stations as part of its goal to increase the use of EVs in the country. CNET, the American media website, graded the "solar energy friendliness" of all US states. Minnesota received a "C" grade, with the positives of solar panel systems being exempt from property and sales taxes, as well as the existence of statewide community solar programs. On the negative side, Minnesota doesn't have state solar tax credits and doesn't offer retail rate net metering.



The New York Times reported on August 14 that half of Puerto Rico was in the dark after Tropical Storm Ernesto caused damage to the island's power grid. As of September 6, crews are still making permanent repairs to Puerto Rico's electric grid, and "persistent power outages" that occur during normal operational conditions are sparking "outrage" among customers, according to The Associated Press.

On August 19, the World Bank approved \$10 million to improve wastewater collection and treatment in Sint Maarten. The Caribbean country shares the island of Saint Martin with the overseas French collectivity of Saint Martin.

A report on August 28 from the United States Department of Energy said that clean energy jobs in the United States are growing at twice the rate of the country's overall jobs.

In late August, the State of Mississippi approved \$21.6 million in new broadband expansions that will provide broadband to 12,300 households.

Last Energy, a company that plans to build small nuclear reactors, announced that it had closed a new funding round in late August. The company plans to offer reactors that can be built and shipped within 24 hours.

# Broadband investments pay off: new study says that federal broadband investments could add billions to GDP

Research released by Keynesian Technology, an organization that studies the effects of Keynesian economics on the tech field, has found that about \$60 billion in funding authorized under the Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act could have major ripple effects as far as the growth of the economy.

The group studied the effects that access to reliable broadband would have on business productivity, growth, and job creation. They found the industries most helped by implementation of broadband include the information sector, scientific and technical services, government, and real estate.



Their work estimates that \$42.5 billion in Broadband Equity Access and Deployment funds will yield \$84.8 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) growth—that is, growth in the total value of goods and services produced by a country's economy.

Similarly, the \$3 billion Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program will create \$5.99 billion in GDP growth, and the \$14.2 billion Affordable Connectivity Program will lead to \$55.2 billion in GDP growth. With these numbers, the investment of about \$60 billion by the federal government will yield approximately \$146 billion in growth to the economy according to the report.

The authors of the research noted the similarity to the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, which was viewed as expensive by some but also fueled strong economic productivity and growth in the early years of the last century.

# MMUA Announces Updated Strategic Plan



At its August 18, 2024, meeting, MMUA's Board of Directors approved its annual update to the Association's strategic plan.

In order to unify, support, and serve as a common voice for municipal utilities, MMUA will focus on five key areas. These include:

- Effective public policy advocacy
- Strategic preservation of local control
- Excellence in member benefits
- Best-in-class programs and services
- Efficient association operations

At MMUA's annual meeting on August 21, 2024, MMUA CEO Karleen Kos briefed members of the Association on strategic progress that has been made over the past two years and areas of specific operational focus for the organization between now and the end of 2025.

Kos says, "The utilities industry overall is experiencing rapid change. Climate-related factors, governmental initiatives, and advancing technologies are all driving evolution at a speed not seen in more than a century. The surge in demand for renewable energy sources, focus on environmental sustainability, new demands from customers

such as data miners and those seeking interconnection with co-generators, grid updates, evolving water and land rights, the presence of human-caused water contaminants, aging infrastructure, and more, are all producing enormous challenges for MMUA members.

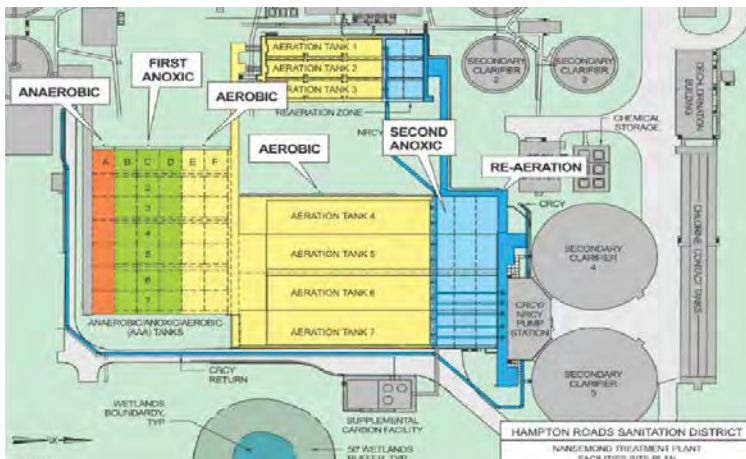
"Against this backdrop, the leaders of municipal utilities carry out their missions, working 24/7 to meet the constantly evolving needs of their communities and the requirements of the larger world. MMUA stands with them. We will support municipal utilities with programs, services, and advocacy that provide guidance in unfamiliar territory and a roadmap to excellence in the new environment. Our strategic plan aims to prepare us all for the changes and challenges ahead."

MMUA will announce its 2025 operating priorities later in the year. These priorities will put the strategic plan into action with specific deliverables, timelines, and chains of accountability. The plan is available for review on MMUA's website at [mmua.org/get-to-know](http://mmua.org/get-to-know). Members in attendance at the Summer Conference in Fargo also received a hard copy in their packets.

# \$1 billion Virginia wastewater treatment plant will protect Chesapeake Bay, area groundwater

Suffolk, Virginia, will soon be the site of the new Nansemond Treatment Plant, a wastewater treatment facility that will help the community replenish the local aquifer, guard against saltwater intrusion, and reduce nutrient discharges into Chesapeake Bay.

The plant will use the latest water treatment methods to turn wastewater into drinking water that will be used across the region. The project will also recharge local aquifers through 19 managed recharge wells in eastern Virginia.



Construction is expected to start in the fall of 2025, and the facility will be operational in the spring of 2029. Hampton Roads

Sanitation District is the client and North Kansas City-based Garney will lead the project team.

## Upcoming events

### Human Resources Webinar: Employee Sick and Safe Time

September 26, 10:00 am  
Register at [mmua.org](http://mmua.org)

MMUA invites all members to participate in this free webinar focused on the Earned Sick and Safe Time law. The session will include the latest updates resulting from the 2024 legislative session and information you need for successfully implementing the law's requirements at your utility. Shelly Dau, Organizational Development and Human Resources Manager at MMUA, will be presenting. Registration is required for this meeting, and Zoom access information will be provided in your confirmation email. For questions about the webinar, reach out to [sdau@mmua.org](mailto:sdau@mmua.org).

### Transformer School and Pre-conference Workshop

November 19–22  
MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Transformer School and the optional pre-conference workshop will be held in November, not December this year. Register for the school and pre-conference workshop separately by October 15 for the best rate. More information is available at [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events).

### Technical and Operations (T&O) Conference

December 10–12  
Holiday Inn, St. Cloud

Make plans to attend this not-to-be-missed event! The theme for this year's T&O Conference is "Safer Together." You are sure to be inspired by Rod Courtney's keynote presentation on the eight habits of a highly effective safety culture, gain new insights participating in discussions and learning sessions, and strengthen relationships with other municipal professionals. Information on the T&O Conference and Trade Show is available at [mmua.org/events/tech-oper-conf-2024](http://mmua.org/events/tech-oper-conf-2024).

For more information, see the Events Calendar at [www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org) or call MMUA at 763-551-1230.