

THE RESOURCE

Official Publication of the
Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association



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December 2024
Volume 29, No.10

MMUA
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Owatonna Public Utilities continues to make history on its 100th anniversary

On October 10, Owatonna Public Utilities (OPU) celebrated its 100th anniversary of operation.

Offering building tours, speeches, demonstrations, food vendors, and games, the festivities provided an opportunity for the entire Owatonna community to come together and celebrate the vital asset that OPU represents in its hometown.

Today, OPU provides electricity, water, and natural gas to customers located in its Steele County territory. With nearly \$70 million in annual revenue—around 2.5 percent of which is returned to the city in lieu of taxes—the utility serves 12,000 electric, 9,700 water, and 10,500 natural gas customers. To do that, OPU relies on the leadership of its Commission, and it employs more than 50 professionals working in a wide range of positions. Together, they ensure the lights stay on, the air temperature is comfortable, and the water is safe.



The day dawned clear and sunny for Owatonna Public Utilities, 100-year celebration held at OPU headquarters on Walnut Street. The building, with its high, arched windows, silver smokestacks, and "Owatonna Power Plant" sign has been a downtown landmark since 1924. A 2010 flood destroyed the plant's generating capacity, but a visionary redesign repurposed the structure to house the administrative offices where a huge central space uses the building's interior steel structure as scaffolding to create an atrium and the illusion of floating offices.

How it all started

Like many things in the municipal utility world, it took time for Owatonna's utility

operations to coalesce into what we see as OPU today. Electricity and water services first came to Owatonna in the late 1800s,

with the inaugural electric streetlights arriving in town as the result of an 1890 contract to install and operate 10 electric

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Consequential election brings changes and uncertainty for Minnesota's municipal utilities

By Kent Sulem

The 2024 elections have come and gone. Even so, the final results for a few seats at both the federal and state levels may not be known for a while due to different rules among the jurisdictions regarding how and when votes get counted.

Recounts can delay things too, but my deadline for publication is firm. So, the analysis you are about to read is based on what is known as of this writing on November 7, two days after the election.

At the federal level, the victory of former President Trump and his running mate Ohio Senator JD Vance, together with a strong down-ballot showing, means Republicans will take power in the executive branch and quite possibly sweep the legislative branch as well.

In Minnesota, the ticket of

Vice-President Kamala Harris and Minnesota's own governor, Tim Walz, won 50.89 percent of the vote, enough to claim Minnesota's 10 electoral college delegates. The margin was far smaller than expected by most pollsters, and it was heavily influenced by an urban/DFL versus outstate/GOP divide that continues to become more evident in each election.

The loss by Harris-Walz at the top of the ticket means Governor Walz will presumably return to Minnesota and resume his duties as Governor. That will forestall some of the complicated chess moves that could have occurred had the Democratic ticket prevailed at the federal level, setting off a string of succession consequences in Minnesota that would have affected the delicate balance in the state senate.

In Minnesota's other federal

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Government Relations Advisory Group kicks off its 2025 legislative priority planning

On October 25, MMUA's Government Relations Advisory Group (GRAG) met to kick off its priorities for the 2025 legislative session.

Federal issues

Michael Nolan reviewed the status of the federal lawmaking bodies and reflected on the likely post-election scenarios. Congress was scheduled to be out for the elections until November 12. When they reconvene, and essentially through the end of December, they will deal with the Continuing Resolution for funding the federal government. Another issue that is a must-pass in this lame-duck period is the National Defense Authorization Act. There is also a major Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) package that will likely come during the lame-duck session resulting from recent hurricanes

in the Southeast. Within that bill, there will be some legislation important to public power, as small utilities are eligible under the Stafford Act to receive federal reimbursements through FEMA. It takes a while to get those funds, so communities are often forced to take out loans. The House wants to fix this, and they have several cosponsors for such legislation.

Permitting reform will also likely arise during the lame-duck session. Senator Joe Manchin is retiring, and this topic is a top priority for him as he prepares to leave office. Public Power generally supports this permitting reform legislation; however, controversial transmission issues still need to be resolved.

Michael also talked about the elections and some guesses regarding possible outcomes. For a summary of the 2024 election

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New EPA rule requires removal of all lead pipes within a decade



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MMUA *The Resource* USPS #009836. ISSN: 1080-3750 is published monthly; except combined July/August, by MMUA at 600 Highway 169 S, Ste 701, St. Louis Park, MN 55426. Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MMUA *The Resource*, 600 Highway 169 S, Ste 701, St. Louis Park, MN 55426. Annual subscription rates: \$12 per subscription (included in dues), associate members, \$12 (included in dues). 600 Highway 169 S, Ste 701, St. Louis Park, MN 55426. Phone: 763-551-1230, (Minnesota only) 1-800-422-0119.

Jen Williams joins MMUA

Jen Williams has joined MMUA as the Director of Marketing and Member Relations.

Jen is excited to support MMUA's members and team and advance the marketing of the Association's brand.

Jen attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she earned a degree in marketing. She became interested in marketing while working retail during high school and college, as well as taking business courses.

Jen has experience working for

Ecolab, as well as for Xcel Energy, where she started to become interested in the utilities world.

In the spring and summer, Jen enjoys being outdoors doing planting and gardening. She also enjoys golfing. When the weather turns colder, she likes to read mysteries, thrillers, and autobiographies.

Jen is married to her husband Mark, and they have a son, Paul, and daughter, Alayna. Paul is a senior at UW-River Falls majoring in business management and finance, and Alayna is a sopho-



more at the U of M in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences.

Welcome to MMUA, Jen!

Deb Guggisberg joins MMUA

Deb Guggisberg has joined MMUA as Accounting Assistant.

Deb will be supporting MMUA's financial activities, both internally and externally facing.

Deb is a graduate of the College of St. Benedict and has worked in accounting and purchasing for over 25 years. One of her recent roles was working for Meet

Minneapolis, the Minneapolis convention and visitors association.

Deb is the oldest of five sisters and grew up on a farm near Fairfax, where her mom still lives. She also has five nieces and five nephews! In her free time, Deb enjoys reading and watching movies, as well as hiking and kayaking.

Welcome to MMUA, Deb!



Swift County Board of Commissioners rejects moratorium on wind power development

On October 15, during a meeting of the Swift County Board of Commissioners, Commissioner Larry Mahoney called for a moratorium on wind power development in the county, but the move did not receive a second and thus didn't move forward.

The move came on the heels of the announcement of a proposed 400-megawatt solar farm in the county. Commissioner Mahoney said that due to the proposed wind farm, a petition had been circulated in the county asking for a moratorium.

Before the vote for a moratorium

was brought to the floor, county residents were given a chance to speak about their opinions on the vote. Eight people spoke, with some being against a moratorium and others in favor.

Swift County previously rejected a wind development moratorium in May 2024.



Paying our dues

Maybe I am just not that bright, but it appears there is a lesson about communication I have to learn over and over.

In short, it's tricky. The sender of a message may be making certain information available. It might be done once or a hundred times—but until the intended receiver takes the message in and understands it in a way that is meaningful *to the receiver*, "communication" has not occurred.

I was reminded of this most recently when I was meeting with the MMUA Dues Task Force. This group of volunteers is working at the request of the Board and staff to study MMUA's dues structure and to consider the various factors that may impact utility operations in Minnesota over the next decade or so. The goal is for them to recommend ways in which the structure might be updated so that it is appropriate for the emerging metrics and drivers of utility services in the coming years. The task force's work is expected to take until mid-summer 2025, when it will be presented to the Board of Directors and then to the full membership for approval.

I expect that I'm starting to lose you right now, fair reader. Nobody likes to talk about dues. They tend to rank on a list with treating athlete's foot, cleaning the cat box, and dealing with sellers of used cars. Most folks find all these experiences irritating but

necessary, while vaguely feeling suspicious that something unseen might be going on that isn't good.

Nevertheless, I should tell you that our first dues task force meeting was interesting, and not irritating to anybody as far as I know. We've got some great volunteers who run utilities of all sizes from around Minnesota helping with this. Ahead of the meeting, MMUA staff provided background information about the current dues structure, and then I walked everyone through some facts that are important to keep in mind as we embark on this dues adventure. As I shared, the group said more than once, "You ought to tell everyone this story!"

Yes. About dues. And that was the moment I again realized that *communication* about dues had not been occurring. Each year, MMUA's treasurer provides most of the same background information about dues to the assembled group at the annual membership meeting. Perhaps it was because the task force was motivated to listen differently, or maybe my slide deck was Just. That. Amazing. Who knows. Anyway, it is at the suggestion of your peers on the Dues Task Force that I share the following information with you now—in, perhaps, a different format than you've seen it before.

1. MMUA's dues cover things from which all members derive benefits

but whose costs cannot be easily subdivided. The dues are similar to taxes we all pay for streets, libraries, police protection, and other services in our towns. At MMUA, dues fund our government relations work in St. Paul, something that requires expertise and professionalism year around. Dues also pay for the creation and updating of procedures like the Minnesota Municipal Interconnection Process (M-MIP), model utility-related ordinances, and cold weather rule guidance. Tools like this save each utility from the costs and headaches of figuring the issues out on their own. Dues allow us to produce publications like *The Resource* and *The Digest*, fund MMUA's website, and support the infrastructure that makes mutual aid possible. They also ensure we have staff to help you with everything from locating and writing grants, to gaining comparable salary data, to providing support on topics ranging from the new Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) law to lead pipes.

2. MMUA's dues do not pay for anything related to fee-for-service programs.

Programs such as safety, job training, gas circuit rider, apprenticeship, and leadership development are paid for by their fees. To isolate these expenses, MMUA uses a system similar to your utility's cost-of-service allocations. This ensures the indirect expenses

From My Desk to Yours

Karleen Kos
MMUA CEO



related to fee-for-service programs, including accounting and human resources support, office space, insurance, and auditing, are allocated to these programs and covered by their fees.

3. MMUA's dues represent only about 25 percent of MMUA's budget. This means out of a budget of more than \$6 million each year, just \$1.4 million come from regular member dues. Associate and affiliate members collectively pay about \$118,600 in dues as well.

According to the American Society of Association Executives benchmarking data, the average trade association similar to MMUA today receives about 52.41 percent of its total revenue from dues, more than double MMUA's rate. Even this is lower than what has been traditional for associations. For centuries, going back to medieval guilds, dues covered 100 percent of an association's expenses to fund communal activities, and it was the case at MMUA until at least the 1990s. In other words, as a percent of the total mission-driven work we do, MMUA's dues have been steadily going down over the years.

4. MMUA's dues are also comparatively low in absolute dollars. Over the years, MMUA's staff and Board leaders have done everything possible to serve members well while being frugal with the funds available to us.

I recently spoke with the staff leader of another municipal utility association in the Midwest. It is similar in size and scope to MMUA, and they currently get around 28 percent of their budget from dues. However, that

organization's Board has recently committed to raising dues 12.5 percent in each of the next three years—a total more than 40 percent overall when compounded year over year—because they have organizational goals they would like to attain, and they need more money to do it. Their members have accepted the increase because they support the goals of the association.

In another region of the country, it is my understanding that the overall dues being paid by a public power utility association are considerably higher, both in absolute dollars and as a percentage of the association's budget.

What does any of this have to do with Minnesota? It provides context. At this point, MMUA is not proposing that we raise dues by a large number to increase services, nor are we asking for a pat on the back because of our responsible handling of dues funds to date. We just figured it couldn't hurt to let you know how MMUA's dues compare with other associations, particularly those in the municipal utilities space. With help from the task force, MMUA's goal is to adjust the formula for how we collect dues, whatever the total amount may be, so the process does not disproportionately impact any member.

5. No one can raise dues except a super-majority of the members. This is really important to keep in mind. Each year at the annual membership meeting, designated utility representatives vote on the dues resolution put forth by the Board of Directors. Typically, members of the Board also explain the achievements of the prior year and the vision for how dues will be used in the coming year so everyone knows what they are voting for. No matter how strongly the Board or any committee feels about what the dues should be each year, nothing is official until a two-thirds majority of the quorum present approves the dues.

6. The current dues structure was designed to be fair, but not equal. The structure currently in place has been based on the

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Owatonna Public Utilities

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arc lights.

Later in 1890, Owatonna's water system became fully functional using steam-driven pumps to raise well water to aboveground storage in a stand-pipe. According to Owatonna's official history, *A Century of Progress*, "requests for water main extensions to homes and businesses were an almost daily occurrence, as were calls to install sanitary sewer lines" after that. As with emerging technology systems today, the utilities were important to the town but didn't always run smoothly. Owatonna's water department was still not self-sustaining by 1900, and a tax was required to keep it going. By 1910, the city's wells were going dry.

Meanwhile, the electricity system in town had been operated by Owatonna Electric, Light, and Heat, a community-organized company created with the intention of receiving external investments for a city power plant. However, the company's franchise in the city was often contentious. The organization did things such as bill customers for gas that they never received, and threatened to turn off the city's streetlamps (a very important thing at the time) if they didn't get what they wanted.

Eventually, an organization called the Public Service Operating Company took over utility operations in Owatonna, but they had struggles and misbehaviors of their own. By June of 1922, a private company began providing electricity in Owatonna, the Southern Minnesota Gas and Electric Company. During its short tenure, that firm was not good to Owatonna either, and "they did little to hide their arrogance ... they overbilled the city and the citizen, ignored official requests," and generally burned bridges, as recorded in OPU's history volume.

By 1923, the community had had enough. Most homes had electricity and gas by now, and the voters wanted a permanent change for the better. So, the Owatonna City Council began taking bids for a new power plant of their own, and voters approved the formation of a public utilities commission. That meant 1924 brought the first meetings of the Owatonna Public Utilities Commission, establishing OPU's founding year.

Building for the future

With the formation of the municipal utility, Owatonna's citizens had the tools to make life better by investing in public infrastructure that would serve the community's residents and businesses for years to come.

Voters approved bonds to erect Owatonna's first community-owned power plant in 1924. The facility was finished the same year and provided 1000



In honor of the anniversary, OPU staff developed and published an official history of the utility. GIS coordinator Shannon Petty and marketing assistant Taylor Arndt doubled as greeters and booksellers as visitors arrived at OPU on the day of its 100th anniversary celebration.



OPU put a sizable birthday cake on display the day of the celebration, and full building tours were available throughout the day.



Outside, staff teams provided demonstrations at multiple locations around the OPU campus. A member of the meter shop team is shown here, explaining how different types of electric and gas metering works. A water meter connected to a water source was also shown at this location. Other sites included a substation, a chance to look inside a utility truck, and a lineworker demonstration. A large tent with pumpkin painting and games, food trucks, and a straw bale maze filled up the parking lot and made OPU the best destination in town for the day.



Representatives of Owatonna's Chamber of Commerce joined OPU's general manager Roger Warehime, pictured in the center in a tan jacket, kicking off the festivities by presenting OPU with its official recognition of the utility's contributions to the community.

kilowatts (kW) from two 500-kW steam turbine generators. The utilities commission also addressed water issues in the town by drilling another well in 1927.

Electricity growth and water

demand continued to go up over the decades, even with the impacts of the Great Depression and World War II. Owatonna's "dire" water situation finally improved and became self-sup-

porting, with new, deeper wells, technology upgrades such as a steam-driven compressor and airlift apparatus, and better management. In the 1920s the new commission also began

providing services through a short-lived steam heat utility, and in 1936 they added the municipal operation of a gas utility to the mix of services provided in Owatonna.

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Owatonna Public Utilities

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The main hallway of OPU's headquarters parallels the street and descends at a gentle slope. The new building design has raised the height of the offices above the 2010 flood level, and the hall returns visitors to the original street level. Along the way, the walls serve as a small museum, displaying items from OPU's old generation plant and other aspects of its history. These items are present for the pleasure of OPU's visitors any day of the year, linking the past with the present in an artful and informative way.

The postwar era

The period from the late 1940s to the early 1970s was a time of tremendous growth in the United States, and Owatonna was no exception. Owatonna's load grew at about 10 percent per annum in the period from 1945 to 1965. Owatonna's population grew about 50 percent between 1950 and 1970, and its business community grew as well.

The utilities commission tried to meet the demand growth through a combination of buying power and constant expansion of its own power generation resources. Notable additions to the power fleet in this era included a 6,000-watt turbo generator and a 20,000 kW generator. An overhaul of the power plant between 1967 and 1970 was also a major effort to keep the lights on for the people of Owatonna.

Changing times

The economic downturns and gas shortages of the 1970s, combined with changes to the power generation market, had OPU looking at how to smooth out the peaks and valleys of their power generation costs. The passage of a law enabling the formation of municipal power joint agencies by the 1976 Minnesota Legislature allowed Owatonna, Rochester, and Austin to come

together to form the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) in 1977. This allowed all member utilities to work together to achieve economies of scale that made them competitive in a new era.

The cooperation made possible through SMMPA, which now includes 17 member utilities, paved the way for the organization's 41 percent ownership of the Sherco Unit 3 coal-fired power plant in Becker, Minnesota. This dispatchable baseload generating facility has provided 359 MW of power to its member utilities since 1987, and it will continue to operate until its anticipated closure in 2030. Collaborative work through SMMPA has also made it possible for OPU and SMMPA's other member utilities to begin the transition to clean energy, making the economic and regulatory future of OPU's power generation very bright.

The new millennium

OPU was tested in 2010 when surging water from the Straight River flooded the town, including OPU's historic power plant. Fast work and a dedicated team made it possible for OPU to save much of its equipment and files as the floodwaters rose. However, the plant was seriously damaged by the flood.

In the aftermath, Owatonna made lemonade from lemons when they moved to preserve the vintage building as OPU's new headquarters. The exterior and the interior are a wonder of historic preservation, allowing people to see what it was like to work in this building during its operational years. At the same time, it is a modern, livable space, keeping with OPU's dedication to always being progressive in its activities and infrastructure.

OPU today

Today, OPU is still dedicated to the same things that it was 100 years ago—providing hometown services that meet the needs of the community, while doing so with reliability, affordable rates, and consciousness of the need to constantly evolve. OPU shares its talents and time with the community, telling the story of the utility and how they came to be. It certainly is a far cry from the tumult of those early years before public ownership came to town. The hundreds of employees and dozens of commissioners who have served Owatonna over the years are to be commended for their leadership, sacrifice, and caring for their fellow citizens.

Happy 100th birthday, OPU!

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philosophy that MMUA will be strongest in carrying out its mission, whether in St. Paul or on the ground in a hometown utility, if all munis are members of the association and singing off the same song sheet to the extent possible. To achieve that unanimity, the current structure has meant utilities more able have paid more dues than those less able.

This is similar to how things work elsewhere in our American system. We don't all pay the same amount of property or income taxes, and nobody is kept from using the parks or the streets in town because they paid less. MMUA's current dues structure thus takes into account the population size of the community, the size of the utility in terms of its service volume, and its revenue. Whatever the total amount of dues that has been approved by the members is then apportioned across the membership using a weighted formula. In 2025, the total dues we will collect from regular members is around \$1.4 million, with the smallest utilities paying around \$91 and the largest, strongest one paying \$75,575.

7. We are looking at the dues structure, not the dues rate. In general, it appears we have a consensus that the services currently paid for by dues are both necessary to MMUA's members and being delivered in a fiscally responsible manner. The issue at hand, therefore, is how to apportion the dues across the membership in the future. Changes such as the impact of data centers, issues such as communities that rely on a small number of commercial customers, and industry changes such as the shift to renewables all need to be con-



sidered in the dues structure going forward.

I have spoken with a number of my peers from other state utility associations about how they are handling these challenges. Nobody has figured out how to create a structure that accounts for all these things. In fact, a few state associations have tried to update their dues structures only to largely abandon the effort. They found meaningful changes in their structures would have caused mayhem due to huge fluctuations from the status quo, and the push-back from their members was intense. So our task will not be easy, but we are in good company in trying to find a fair and strategic path forward.

8. Expect overall dues to go up a little every year. The costs that underlie dues—salaries, benefits, insurance, office space—rise annually, commensurate with inflation. To keep things simple, the MMUA Board has decided it will generally recommend a total dues increase that mirrors these new, real costs. We hope the membership will support this approach when they vote each August. It will keep dues predictable and manageable for everyone over time.

9. Yes, someone is minding the store. Each year, MMUA's members vote for their peers to serve on the Board of Directors. These Board members are watching how the staff manages the

finances so that you can feel comfortable the dues you pay are being used frugally and strategically.

Should the time come when members want MMUA to offer additional services, your peer Board members are the people who will ask the tough questions. Can the new services be easily subdivided and offered on a fee-for-service basis? If not, the Board will help staff discern whether the new service should replace something that is no longer relevant or is important enough to justify raising dues more than the rate of inflation.

I have no illusions that the information I've just shared here was interesting enough to stick in your brain until next August when we again gather for the annual membership meeting. At that point, there will be a vote on the 2026 dues, likely within an updated dues structure. Before that meeting, I expect the Board, together with the Dues Task Force, will offer a workshop to help you understand the work they've done and the structure they recommend going forward.

If you have read this far, I'm hoping you now know more than you did about how all this works. I am also wondering whether you were completely fascinated with the whole topic, or you just stuck with it because nobody is going to call you a quitter. Either way, I'll take it, and I thank you for your attention. You have officially paid your dues.

Two Minnesota hydro plants receive DOE hydroelectric production incentive payments

On October 9, the US Department of Energy (DOE) announced \$12 million in hydroelectric production incentive payments for electricity generated and sold in calendar year 2023.

The payments will go to 39 hydroelectric facilities throughout the United States that have maintained or enhanced their facilities while improving dam safety and reducing environmental impacts. Two Minnesota hydropower plants were selected to receive payments:

The Lower Saint Anthony Falls Hydroelectric Project will receive \$933,546, and Albion Hydro, LLC will receive \$6500.

The program was authorized in 2005 and provides payments to qualified hydroelectric facilities. These facilities meet guidelines such as having below 20 megawatts of generation capacity, being a non-federal entity, and beginning hydro generation on or after 2005 (with exceptions for hydro facilities that were offline for five consecutive years or more).

FCC makes inquiries about broadband data caps



On October 15, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a "Notice of Inquiry" on landline and mobile broadband data caps, and the reason for their continued use.

The FCC noted data caps usually serve little purpose except to charge consumers more, and they may have negative effects on consumers as data use continues to increase.

As a result, the FCC is seeking comments on several items in this area, including the

impact of data caps on customer service and prices, the impact of data caps on public safety, and how the caps impact consumers with disabilities, particularly for people who use data to help them with things such as deafness or speech disabilities.

Given these concerns, the FCC said it has legal authority to take action regarding data caps. The comment period will give consumers and broadband operators alike a chance to voice their concerns.



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Consequential election brings changes and uncertainty

Continued from page 1

ances, senior Senator Amy Klobuchar won re-election and will start her fourth term in the U.S. Senate. However, because the Democrats were unable to defend all of their seats that were up for re-election and thus lost the majority, Senator Klobuchar will lose her role as Chair of the Rules Committee. She is expected to become the Minority Lead on the Agriculture Committee, which means she will have some influence on the already overdue Farm Bill. (A quick side observation – one of the seats Democrats lost was Sherrod Brown's, Ohio's senior Senator. With J.D. Vance vacating his seat to become Vice President, Bernie Moreno, who beat Senator Brown, becomes Ohio's senior Senator without having ever previously held office.)

The seven members of the Minnesota congressional delegation seeking re-election at the 2024 elections were all successful, and all prevailed by significant double-digit margins. That was a surprise in Minnesota's Second District, where Angie Craig (DFL) bested challenger

Joe Teirab by 13.46 points in a race that had been widely seen as Minnesota's most competitive. The eighth seat was the Third District seat held by Dean Phillips, and the DFL held the seat when former state Senator Kelly Morrison easily defeated Tad Jude by 17 points.

The net result is that Minnesota will continue to send an evenly split (4-4) delegation to DC, where it is likely a Republican agenda will prevail, at least for the first two years of the new presidency. Exactly what that will mean for Minnesota's utilities is uncertain at this point, although it is safe to assume much of the current administration's emphasis on climate change will be sidelined or discarded.

Turning to state races, the DFL held the Senate District 45 seat vacated by Kelly Morrison, so the 2025 legislative session will begin with the DFL still holding a one-seat Senate majority. Senator Nicole Mitchell remains under felony indictment, the resolution of which could ultimately impact the Senate's makeup. At the very least, Republicans

might restart their Senate floor protests to her remaining seated as a Senator, especially considering that shortly after adjournment of the 2024 regular legislative session, both Governor Walz and State DFL Chair Ken Martin called for her to resign.

This brings us to the election results that could really shake things up at the Capitol—the outcome of the 134 House of Representatives races. When the polls opened on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, the DFL held a 70-64 majority. This meant the Republicans needed to flip a net-gain of four seats to retake the majority and end the DFL trifecta of holding the majority in the House, Senate, and the Governor's office. At present, it appears they fell one seat shy of this goal, meaning they picked up three seats. As a result, at the time of publication, the Minnesota House of Representatives is looking like it will gavel in with a 67-67 party tie in the chamber.

There were two House races so close that the losing candidates are entitled to, but

must request, a state-financed recount. The first such race is in District 14B, which is primarily the St. Cloud area. DFL Representative Dan Wolgamott appears to have retained his seat by only 28 votes, a .04 percent margin over his opponent. The threshold for a state-paid recount is 0.5 percent.

The second expected House recount is in District 54A, which includes the city of Shakopee. In that race, DFL incumbent Brad Tabke appears to have retained his seat by a mere 13 votes, representing a margin of victory of only .06 percent over his opponent.

If the Republican challenger were to win either or both of these expected recounts, the tie would be broken, and Republicans will regain control of the Minnesota House of Representatives. If the incumbents prevail in both recounts, and no unexpected factor intervenes, the House will convene on January 14 with the 67-67 split.

The best bet for the Democrats to pick up a seat would be in District 3B, where the incumbent,

Representative Natalie Zelenznikar, won her reelection by 160 votes or 0.6 percent. Because the margin of victory in that race exceeds the maximum for a state-paid recount, the DFL challenger would not only have to request the recount but agree to pay for it as well, and that makes it fairly unlikely to happen.

House Democrats were scheduled to caucus on Thursday, November 7, to decide who their desired leaders will be and to determine negotiation strategies on how to govern in a tie. House Republicans were scheduled to do the same on Friday, November 8.

There has been no precedent for a tied chamber in nearly two generations. The 1979 legislative session is the only other time the Minnesota House has convened with a 67-67 tie. In that instance, leaders spent a lot of time between the election and the start of that session, and after a lot of heated debate, produced a plan under which the Republicans got the Speaker of the House, and the Democrats got the chairperson on all major committees. However, it did not take long for chaos to erupt, and the plan ultimately failed to work as desired.

The general description left to us from 45 years ago sounds like the entire 1979 session was a prequel to the type of behavior seen in St. Paul during the closing days of the 2024 session. Hopefully, any agreement reached now will work better than the 1979 approach. It is critical that some effective plan is put in place as legislators in 2025 will need to pass a budget for the FY2026 and FY2027 biennium. It will take 68 votes to pass any bill or to even have a quorum to convene a House floor session. So while no one expects perfect harmony within the chamber, lawmakers will have to find a path to civility sufficient to conduct the work to which voters have entrusted them.

What does all this mean for municipal utilities? At the federal level, we will need to ensure that recently achieved tax incentives such as direct pay are not eliminated. On the other hand, there will likely be a reduction in certain federal mandates regarding such things as emissions and air quality. How quickly or slowly these changes occur, and whether they are straightforward or held up in the courts, is anybody's guess as of this writing.

At the state level, fewer new mandates are expected to pass. At the same time, it is not likely the votes exist to repeal existing ones. In a bit of irony, a bonding bill focused on funding infrastructure repair and replacement may be easier to

Continued on page 8



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Massachusetts implements automatic utility discounts for low-income residents

An agreement reached between the Governor of Massachusetts and five statewide utility companies will see low-income Bay Staters qualify for automatic utility discounts if they receive state or federal program benefits such as Massachusetts' MassHealth, Supplemental Nutrition Benefits, Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children.

The companies that have joined in the partnership with



the state include Berkshire Gas, Eversource, Liberty Gas, National Grid, and Unitil.

Participating residents are expected to see an average dis-

count of 25 percent on gas and 42 percent on electricity without having to turn in any additional paperwork. The program will go into effect in late 2024.

Man arrested in Florida after threatening utility workers



On October 14, a man was arrested in the Tampa area in Hillsborough County, Florida, after becoming impatient during the restoration of power by lineworkers.

Unable to tolerate further traffic backups due to utility work, Kenneth Velasco backed into a utility pole and fence and then tried to leave the scene of the crime.

Utility crews stopped Velasco, but he threatened to shoot them and drove toward a lineworker, almost hitting the person. Velasco was later stopped by police and charged with aggravated assault and felony criminal mischief for vandalism of property.

Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister said, "Linemen have been working tirelessly to restore power after the storm. For this person to threaten their lives and deliberately endanger them, all because of a traffic delay, shows a disturbing lack of regard for the safety of others and the critical work being done. We're grateful no one was seriously hurt, and this suspect will face the full extent of the law for his egregious crimes."

Consequential election

Continued from page 7

pass under the circumstances. Such a bill requires a three-fifths supermajority, and with a tied House, striking a deal on projects warranting funding may fall into place.

One last issue worth noting from the 2024 elections is that voters in Minnesota overwhelmingly re-authorized the constitutional language to use lottery funds to protect water, the wilderness, and wildlife habitats. Renewing the dedication of funds was supported by just under 80 percent of voters. Its passage means an increase of 20 percent in the amount of funds that will be collected through

the lottery for the programs, and it removes the legislature from the process of decision-making and oversight. Going forward, the funds will be overseen by a new 11-member appointed commission. The amendment also allows the creation of a grant program to provide funding for projects related to addressing environmental issues in communities, environmental education, and natural resource conservation.



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Willmar Municipal Utilities approves end to wind production

On October 14, the Willmar Municipal Utilities Commission approved the end of Willmar's wind turbine program.

The move came as a result of the aging of the turbines, and the fact that wind production costs would equal wholesale power costs when factoring in the cost of needed repairs.

Willmar's two turbines were produced by DeWind, which was originally headquartered in Germany. The company was liquidated in 2018, and parts have become costly and difficult to obtain. Willmar Municipal Utilities' wind turbines represented two out of a total of three



DeWind turbines still functioning worldwide.

Willmar's wind turbines were put into service in 2009 and had a predicted lifespan of 20 years. Now that the wind program has ended, the turbines will be recycled, with some reusable parts going to WMU for its electrical system.

Google signs first major corporate agreement to purchase nuclear power from SMRs

On October 14, Google signed the first major agreement for the purchase of nuclear power from small modular reactors (SMRs).

Google will purchase power from SMRs that will be developed by Kairos Power, an engineering company that focuses on designing and demonstrating

advanced nuclear reactors.

Google aims to bring the first SMR online by 2030, with additional reactors added to their fleet through 2035. The total amount of the new carbon-free power that Google hopes to bring online is 500 megawatts.

The reactors will be of a molten-salt type that will operate at a low pressure, making them

safer and simpler than traditional reactor designs.

Google said it is pursuing this initiative to support artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and provide clean power for communities around the country. The company says it plans to continue developing advanced clean energy technologies.

Western Tribes receive drinking water systems and treatment funds

On October 1, the Bureau of Reclamation announced Tribal Communities throughout the west will receive \$9.2 million in funds to develop and manage their water resources.

Of special note were almost \$400,000 in funds for the Hopi Tribe to establish an on-site training and testing center for its water system operators, so that local water employees do not have to travel for training. The Ute Tribe of Utah will receive \$400,000 to complete an assessment of its water treat-



ment plant.

The Bureau of Reclamation is a federal agency that oversees

water resource management, particularly in the western United States.

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Florida Mutual Aid in pictures

Staff from MMUA and 15 member utilities were in Kissimmee, and then Orlando, Florida, from October 9-13 helping get the lights back on in the aftermath of Hurricane Milton.

Below are photos of the crew's work in Orlando. MMUA thanks member utility staff and MMUA staff who showed that when the people of public power come together, anything is possible! (Photos courtesy of Cody Raveling)



The crews restringing phases across the road and rebuilt a transformer bank.



They also reenergized a span of overhead line.



Repairing an overhead transformer bank.



Replacing a broken tie wire on a phase.



An uprooted tree shorted a line.



Lineworkers hook up and energize a transformer.

Tree Trimming School



A program participant gets the sawdust flying at this year's tree trimming school, which was held at Hillside Park in Elk River.



Jay Reading, MMUA's assistant director of Technical Services, and a learner size up a cut before going up in the bucket.



A learner works on a cut in the bucket truck with Jay Reading.



The Bobcat was a big help with the larger cut trees.



Jake Kuntz, MMUA's arborist, shows learners how to measure their cut correctly.



A pair of attendees work on cleaning up a tree and getting their cut just right.



Attendees analyze a cut to see what went right and what could be improved.

Government Relations Advisory Group

Continued from page 1

results, see Kent Sulem's article elsewhere in this paper.

Regardless of who holds the majority, 2025 will be a tax year, meaning important tax policy legislation of interest to Public Power will be discussed early. This includes debate on municipal bonds, and a major review of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), including Public Power's tax credits for clean energy resources.

These early efforts might come up during the APPA Legislative Rally. MMUA members should prepare local stories that illustrate the issues ready to discuss with the Minnesota Congressional delegation.

State Issues

The GRAG reviewed and discussed possible issues for the 2025 Minnesota Legislative Session in St. Paul. GRAG chair Roger Warehime said any member can send in their own ideas for issues that may affect municipal utilities this session. Members planned to reconvene

on November 15 to set the agenda and do a post-election wrap up. Recommendations from the GRAG will then be sent to the MMUA Board of Directors for its evaluation and prioritization of the issues in advance of the session gaveling in on January 14.

APPA Legislative Rally Logistics

Bill Black discussed planning for the APPA Rally. To date, it appears turnout for the Rally from Minnesota will be strong and consistent with past years. APPA will be making some changes to its schedule to accommodate Tuesday hill visits by some states. Members who will be joining the Minnesota contingent will want to pay close attention to the published agenda and adjust their plans accordingly. If you have questions about joining MMUA and dozens of other Minnesotans at the APPA Legislative Rally, contact Bill Black at bblack@mmua.org.

Minnesota group of municipals and co-ops again fails to secure GRIP grant funds

On October 18, a grant consortium that included 64 utilities, MMUA, the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA), and the University of Minnesota, received notification that its request for some \$217 million did not score high enough to receive round two funding through the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership (GRIP) grant program.

Applying under topic area one, the group had proposed a series of strategies that would have delivered increased grid reliability and resilience by innovatively pairing new technology solutions with traditional tools. These improvements were expected to benefit consumers and specifically target areas with severe wind and tornadic activity. This is the second disappointment for many in the consortium.

As occurred in round one, the Department of Energy (DOE) received requests for substantially more projects than the available funds would cover. According to the letter DOE provided, "This process was highly competitive, with funding requests totaling over 10x the amount of available funding for Grid Resilience Grants." As a result, most applicants received similar rejection



letters. Projects that were successful tend to be located in areas highly prone to hurricanes and wildfires. The GRIP funds awarded will also cover some transmission-related projects.

Utilities that serve Minnesota were not completely out in the cold. Ottertail Power will receive \$19.6 million toward a \$49.4 million program called Innovative Distributed Energy Automation (IDEA). Other funded collaborative transmission projects will also impact Minnesota to some degree. A full list of the awards and a recorded webinar explaining the program choices is available on doe.gov.

While the future of GRIP funding is unclear in light of the election results, grants are

always available from a variety of sources. MMUA intends to continue seeking grant funding to help extend its mission without raising dues or fees. The Association will continue to offer technical assistance to members seeking to write grants as well.

MMUA's Chief Executive Officer Karleen Kos says, "Over the past year, MMUA has been successful in winning smaller grants for more targeted projects. It may be in our best interest to focus there. While these very large grant programs seem enticing, they are much harder to receive and execute. It's the difference between going after, 'the big one that got away,' and catching your limit of fish you can actually eat."



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New EPA rule requires removal of all lead pipes within a decade

On October 8, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized a rule that will require the removal of lead water pipes by water utilities within the next 10 years.

In a speech in Milwaukee, President Biden said, “It (lead pipe mitigation) hadn’t been given the national priority it demanded though. I’m here today to tell you that I am finally insisting that it gets prioritized, and I’m insisting it get done.”

The new rules are called the Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI). A main focus of the required improvements will be the removal of lead service lines from homeowners’ water systems. This will include the update of service line inventories and recording of their current status.

Water systems will also be required to make changes to drinking water sampling requirements. Utilities will collect and analyze the first liter and fifth liter and use the higher of the two values when analyzing water. Lead contamination levels warranting government enforcement will also drop from the current 15 parts per billion to 10 parts per billion.



Funding for this work currently totals \$26 billion over five years, including \$15 billion for lead service line replacement activities. The Biden Administration also provided an addi-

tional \$2.6 billion in funding on October 8. The EPA estimates the total price of replacing all lead water pipes will cost at least \$45 billion. Independently, Minnesota has set a goal of

replacing all lead service lines by 2033. In May of 2023, Governor Walz signed a bill appropriating \$240 million to help meet that target.

Verizon proposes \$20 billion acquisition of Frontier Communications

On October 11, Verizon filed a joint application with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that would have the company acquire Frontier Communications in a \$20 billion deal. Frontier has 2.2 million fiber subscribers.

Of importance to regulators is that the deal does not hurt competition in the broadband marketplace. Verizon said the acquisition would have minimal overlap of the service territories of the two companies.

If approved, the combined company would have 9.6 million wired broadband customers. The merger would close within 18 months if approved by all parties concerned.

New bipartisan bill to address hydropower and dam safety



US natural gas generation continues to set records

According to new data from the United States Energy Information Administration (EIA), the last few months have seen some of the highest levels of natural gas power generation in American history.

Nine of the 10 days with the most natural gas generation on record occurred in the summer of 2024, with six alone happening in August 2024. On August 2, gas-fired power plants generated seven million megawatt hours of

electricity, which was about 50 percent of all power generation on that day.

The EIA ascribed these generation records to a variety of circumstances, including hotter summers, new combined-cycle

gas capacity, higher generator capacity factors, and low natural gas prices.

Given current trends, it is likely these records will continue to be set, at least in the short to middle term.

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A bill introduced in Congress on October 1 by Representative John Moolenaar (R-Michigan 2) titled “The National Dam and Hydropower Safety Improvements Act,” would establish regulations and best practices around new and existing hydropower installations.

Specifically, the bill would work to amend sections 10 and 15 of the Federal Power Act so the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) would have the power to mandate their dam safety requirements for any new or existing, and only allow licenses to licensees who operate dams or hydropower plants within FERC’s requirements.

FERC would also have new power to establish the financial health of prospective licensees for the sake of safety.

The bill, which is cosponsored in the House by fellow Michigander Representative Debbie Dingell (D-Michigan 6), is being considered in the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Colorado says it needs in-depth review to consider Xcel's wildfire safety proposal

In early October, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), under advisement from the state Attorney General, said regulators would need more time to review Xcel Energy's 2025-2027 wildfire safety proposal.

The plan's information sheet shares objectives such as

tripling the amount of artificial intelligence cameras for rapid detection of fires, use of drone inspections to create three dimensional maps of high-threat fire areas, and establishing a public safety power shutoff program as a wildfire mitigation tool when other tools do not rise to the occasion.

State regulators say they need

more time to look at the plan, so it doesn't create new problems for citizens of the state. Normally, regulators are allowed 250 days to review the plan, which came out in June. Now, CPUC will have an extended window of time to rule on the plan. The decision is required by August of 2025.

Supreme Court rejects emergency request from states on new federal power plant emissions limits



On October 4, the United States Supreme Court passed on granting an emergency request that would have blocked new limits on power plant emissions.

The limits, which were announced in April 2024, will

tighten the emissions standards for toxic metals by 67 percent and enact a 70 percent reduction in the emissions standard for mercury. The rules also include new limits on coal ash and pollutants discharged in wastewater.

Even with the failure of the emergency request, the rules are still under review by lower courts as they determine whether the rules should stay in effect long-term.

Superior mayor floats municipal water utility

On October 1, Superior's Mayor Jim Paine shared his budget plans with the Superior City Council, which included a proposal that Superior own and operate its own water system.

The City of Superior is looking at an 18 percent increase in its water rates next year from its current provider, Superior Water Light & Power.

Superior Water Light & Power spoke out against the idea, saying they had provided utility service to the city since 1889 and questioned whether the city could replace their expertise in the field.

Paine pointed out that if the city doesn't operate the utility in the way the citizens want it, they can vote their public officials out of office. This isn't the case with private utilities.

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Water and wastewater provider American Water Works breached by hackers



On October 7, Camden, New Jersey-based American Water Works announced hackers had breached its computer systems.

The utility first became aware of the attack on October 3. The utility responded to the threat by preemptively shutting down some of its water systems.

The company also contacted law enforcement.

None of American Water Works' systems appeared to be impacted by the hacking incident. The utility serves more than 14 million people in 14 states with water and wastewater services.

New research shows rural solar panels have no negative impact on land values

Research from Loyola College Chicago found Midwestern solar farms have no negative impact on neighboring property values and may be beneficial to land values.

Examination of the subject by the School of Environmental Sustainability at Loyola looked at the value of land near 70 utility-scale solar projects through-

out the Midwest. Instead of decreasing the value of neighboring land, there was actually a slight positive increase in land values, ranging from 0.5 percent to 2 percent increases.

The funding solar farms provide to the local tax base, including schools, may make areas with solar farms a more desirable place to live, thereby increasing land values.

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DOE announces \$1.5 billion in funding for four transmission projects, new National Transmission Planning Study

On October 3, the United States Department of Energy (DOE) announced \$1.5 billion in funding will go to four transmission projects selected by the Transmission Facilitation Program.

The projects chosen include the Aroostook Renewable Project in Maine; the Cimarron Link in Oklahoma; the Southern Spirit Transmission in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi; and

Southline in New Mexico.

The projects all add to grid reliability and resilience and help reduce transmission congestion. Along with the funding announcement, DOE released the National Transmission Planning Study, which has determined transmission capacity will have to increase by at least 100 percent by 2050 to meet American electricity demand.

Palisades nuclear power plant gets federal loan guarantees to enable restart

On September 30, the Biden Administration announced Holtec International, a supplier of equipment and systems for the energy industry, will receive up to \$1.52 billion in federal loan guarantees to restart the Palisades nuclear power plant in Michigan.

Some \$1.3 million in grants were also awarded to electric cooperatives Wolverine Power Cooperative and Hoosier Energy to reduce the cost of clean electricity passed on to their members from Palisades



and other clean energy sources.

The 800-megawatt Palisades plant, which is located in southwest Michigan, was originally

closed in May of 2022. Under the new plans, the plant will receive upgrades and will operate until at least 2051.

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Supreme Court passes on placing emergency hold on EPA's carbon emissions rule



On October 16, the United States Supreme Court rejected putting an emergency hold on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules that will limit coal and gas-fired power plant emissions for plants operating past 2039.

Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch opposed the hold, saying that the applicants are unlikely to suffer harm because the U.S. Court of Appeals will decide the issue before June 2025, when compliance work will actually begin on the rules.

Two of the organizations seeking the stay were the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and the Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned utilities.

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New research shows bacteria found in wastewater can break down plastics

A new study published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* by a team from Northwestern University has found a bacterium commonly found in wastewater systems can break plastics down to their basics.

The bacteria, called *Comamonadaceae*, are found in wastewater and in other natural water environments, where they feed on plastics for food.



The research has established for the first time that the bacteria can break down microplastics into nanoparticles and then into monomers, which bacteria can use as a carbon-based food source.

The discovery illustrates the potential for removing plastics from the environment and from wastewater facilities in a natural, environmentally friendly way.

First offshore New Jersey wind farm receives construction approval

On October 1, the planned Atlantic Shores Wind Farm received construction and operation approval from the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Atlantic Shores, which will be New Jersey's first offshore wind farm, is planned to be constructed in two phases. The complete project will consist of 197 turbines that will generate about

2,800 megawatts of electricity. The wind farm will extend from Atlantic City to Long Beach Island, New Jersey. The project will be situated between 8.7 miles and 12.8 miles from shore, according to varying accounts from the government and the developer. Construction is expected to start in 2025.

New import duties set for Southeast Asian-produced solar cells

On October 1, the United States Department of Commerce announced that anti-subsidy duties would be placed on solar cells that are imported by companies located in Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The announcement is the culmination of work by American solar manufacturers who have argued that Chinese solar manufacturers have used their facilities in Southeast Asia to make solar panels that have unfair trade advantages. The anti-subsidy duties will work to counteract the subsidies that Chinese manufacturers received from the four Southeast Asian countries, including tax exemptions and low prices on electricity and land.



Some of the duties will be applied retroactively for a period of 90 days to counteract imports

that were designed to reach American shores before the ruling.

Pueblo, Colorado to study formation of a municipal utility



On September 23, the Pueblo, Colorado City Council voted 5-2 to study the possibility of ending Pueblo's contract with their current power provider, Black Hills Energy, and starting their own municipal utility.

The cost of the study is \$150,000. Pueblo has seen rate increases in recent years from Black Hills Energy, precipitating the interest in a municipal utility. Pueblo is the ninth-largest city in Colorado.



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Austin has completed its contribution to the community's Spruce Up Austin efforts with the planting of 25 trees in early October. Spruce Up Austin, Inc. was established in 1995 for the purpose of coordinating resources to initiate, establish, and maintain beautification projects in the Austin area with a strong emphasis on planting trees.

Austin Utilities contributes \$1500 to Spruce Up Austin annually, and it assists with tree planting as well. Mike Ruzek, project coordinator for the program, said, "When the community looks good, people feel good."

Bigelow has received a \$208,000 grant through the Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) Border-to-Border Broadband Program. The project will cover 4.16 miles of last-mile buried fiber serving 113 locations, 19 of which are currently unserved. Lismore Cooperative Telephone Company will establish and operate the network.

Senator Amy Klobuchar visited the Winnebago Manufacturing Facility in **Blue Earth** on October 7. Klobuchar learned about the power generation equipment the plant produces. The visit was part of Klobuchar's visits to all 87 counties each year.



On October 10, the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation applauded **Blue Earth** for opening the nation's first Electric Vehicle Charger Reliability and Accessibility funded project. The undertaking brought an upgrade from a previous fast charger to a higher power level charger offering one Combined Charging System connector and one CHAdeMO port. The charger is located at the Blue Earth Welcome Center at the intersection of Interstate 90 and Highway 169.

On October 17, **Buffalo Municipal Utilities** hosted a customer appreciation open house event. It included a kids' zone, bucket truck rides, equipment displays, and a free lunch provided by Bolton & Menk.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) opened a temporary assistance center in **Ceylon** on October 1. The center will assist local citizens affected by the Summer 2024 flooding.



On October 1, crews were on the scene of street flooding in **Moorhead**. A broken pipe was

to blame, with the water main feeding the pipe shut off until repairs could be made.

In mid-October, a semi-trailer was parked at **New Ulm Public Utilities** to gather household items for people affected by the storms that hit rural North Carolina. The truck also collected food and clothing for the effort.

New Ulm Public Utilities is planning to replace two wells on the city water system.

Spring Valley's wastewater treatment plant project is moving



along into its final design phase. The city held a site walk-through with city staff and staff engineers from Bolton & Menk.

Worthington is working to add two new wells to the city's water infrastructure. The wells are expected to be completed by spring of 2025.

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The country of **Uzbekistan** announced in early October that the country would end the use of fuel oil for heating and electricity production by 2030.

In early October, **Texas** Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick discussed reliability issues with the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT), particularly the concerns of Houston-area businesses regarding the time required to restore power after major storms. During Patrick's remarks, he called for the resignation of CenterPoint Energy CEO Jason Wells.

Kazakhstan has voted in favor of the country's first nuclear power plant in a referendum that took place on October 6. Exit polling showed about 70 percent of voters approved the referendum, which will allow for the construction of a nuclear power plant in partnership with Russian nuclear firm Rosatom.

On October 8, **Indiana** Attorney General Todd Rokita released a memorandum of legal guidance saying the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission should investigate early retirements of coal-fired power plants in the state. Rokita argued the Commission is duty-bound to prevent such closures until dispatchable replacement power sources can be brought online.

In a first in the United States, the largest natural gas utility in **Oregon** was added as a defendant in a \$50 billion lawsuit brought by Oregon officials. The suit alleges fossil fuel companies misled their customers about how the burning of natural gas contributes to global warming.

On October 15, **Egypt** and **Djibouti** signed a bilateral agreement to construct a 276.5-kilowatt solar plant in Djibouti. The project will be funded and implemented by Egypt. Egypt also offered to share its expertise in renewable energy and renewable energy training programs so that Djibouti can better pursue its sustainable development and energy goals.

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Wastewater testing done in the overseas department of **French Guiana** has found that vaccine-derived poliovirus is present in sampling. The Pan American Health Organization urged the country to keep polio vaccination levels above 95 percent to prevent outbreaks.



On October 15, the United States Department of Energy said that it had closed a loan guarantee of \$861 million that will allow for the financing of two solar farms in **Puerto Rico**. The solar installations will produce enough energy to power 43,000 homes.

Reuters reported on October 21 that **Turkey** plans to quadruple its wind and solar energy power capacity to 120,000 megawatts by 2035. Turkey estimates it will need \$108 billion in funding to reach its goal.



On October 21, the United Kingdom-based company Space Solar, Reykjavik Energy, and Transition Labs of **Iceland** said they would be working together to supply solar power from space to Icelanders by 2030. A satellite is planned that will transmit 30 megawatts of solar power to Iceland, enough to power about 3,000 homes.

On October 22, the **Alberta** Energy System Operator in the province of Alberta issued a surprise grid alert. The warning was triggered by cold temperatures and three large generators that were offline.

Reporting by the Standard Bank has found that **Nigeria** records an annual economic loss of \$26 billion due to unreliable electricity supplies.

Germany's 2025 budget includes the planned cancellation of federal surveillance of COVID-19 and other diseases in the country's wastewater.

Power outage affects entire island of Cuba

On October 18, the entire island of Cuba was hit with a power cut after one of its main power plants went offline.

On October 17, anticipating high demand, the government had announced that schools would be closed, and government employees would stay home to keep electricity demand from spiking. However, the efforts to reduce demand failed, and the Antonia Guiteras power plant went offline on the morning of October 18. Nearly all of Cuba was then without power.

By the end of October 18, power had been restored for only about 20,000 people in Havana, where the total population is about two million. By the morning of October 19, the country had 500 megawatts of power on



the grid, compared to its usual three gigawatts.

Hurricane Oscar complicated efforts to restore power to the island as it made landfall in eastern Cuba on October 20. Power had only been restored to 216,000 people in Havana by the evening of October 20. By October 21, power was restored

to 50 percent of the capital and 70 percent of the country was back on by October 22.

Some citizens of the country protested due to the lack of power. The Cuban government ascribed the outages to aging infrastructure, low fuel supplies, and increased demand for electricity.

Utilities withdraw air permit for planned Nemadji Trail Energy Center

In mid-October, developers of the planned 625-megawatt Nemadji Trail Energy Center in Superior, Wisconsin, announced they would be withdrawing their air permit for the project.

The developers, including Dairyland Power Cooperative, Minnesota Power, and Basin Electric Power Cooperative in North Dakota, said they were withdrawing from the air permit

process because it is taking longer than planned to get federal permits for the project.

The project has faced several hurdles from local officials, area Tribes, and environmental groups. The utilities say they plan to reapply for the permit once the other permitting at the plant is sorted out.

“Age of Electrification” upon us, says new IEA report

A new report from the International Energy Agency (IEA) says that the long talked of “electrification” of the world’s economies is now upon us.

The IEA says replacing fossil fuels with electricity as the primary energy source in large sectors of the economy is well underway and growing.

The IEA has found demand for electricity has grown twice as fast as the pace of overall energy demand growth in the past decade. This pace will only

accelerate, and the IEA projects electricity demand growth will be six times faster than overall energy demand from 2023–2035.

The IEA also noted that—at least in a global context—data centers will drive only a minor amount of total electricity growth. This means most of the electrification that is expected will come from areas such as electric vehicles, electrification of heating and cooling in buildings, and general electricity demand growth in the developing world.

Wyoming Legislature to introduce 2025 bill allowing municipalities to construct and maintain electricity production facilities

On October 22, the Wyoming Legislature’s Corporations, Elections & Political Subdivisions Committee voted to allow Wyoming municipalities to have electricity production facilities that could be used as a revenue source for cities.

This enables lawmakers to move the idea forward as a bill in the legislature in 2025.

The Wyoming Association of Municipalities is fully supportive of the bill. Wyoming only has 12 municipal electric utilities, but the hope is that

a new law could pave the way for municipal utilities to build electric facilities. Cities without municipal utilities would be able to partner with others to build electric facilities as well.

Upcoming events

MMUA Cyber and Fiscal Security Threats and Preparation Regional Workshops

January 21—MMUA office, St. Louis Park
January 22—New Ulm
January 23—Brainerd

Minnesota cities and local utility companies face an imposing array of cyber risks that are very real and increasing by the day. The cyber adversary may be a prankster, disgruntled current or former employee, hacker, or something much worse.

Like all businesses, public power and other hometown utilities are potentially exposed to data breaches involving personal information of employees, customers, and vendors. However, utilities face an even greater risk when they are exposed to cyber espionage, cyber extortion, and cyber attacks consisting of the manipulation or destruction of utility control systems and the equipment they operate and rely on.

Join MMUA and a host of experts who will offer valuable insights that can help you identify and mitigate these imposing threats to protect your vital systems, infrastructure, and reputation. More information and registration are coming soon.

Legislative Conference

January 28–29
DoubleTree by Hilton
Saint Paul Downtown

MMUA’s Legislative Conference is one of the municipal utility community’s primary opportunities to inform and influence state lawmakers. This year’s event will occur near the start of the session. It is prime time for getting ahead of the push for final committee action and to lobby for a bonding bill adequate to meet utility infrastructure needs.

The conference will include engaging presentations from a diverse array of industry and legal experts. Topics will cover a variety of local government issues, MMUA’s administrative and legislative priorities, and more.

Check the event page on MMUA’s website for additional details.

Meter School and Pre-Conference

February 4–7
MMUA Training Center
Marshall

Meter School is a once-a-year opportunity to obtain hands-on technical electric metering training. There are two course options, Beginner/intermediate and Advanced, to allow participants to progress at a pace to fit their motivation and abilities. There is a pre-conference workshop held in conjunction with the school. Register online at mmua.org/events/meter-2025/register.

For more information, see the Events Calendar at www.mmua.org or call MMUA at 763-551-1230.