

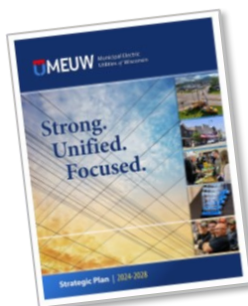
LIVELines

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Strategy discussions are propelling MEUW into the future

Members of MEUW's Board of Directors and staff engaged in a one-day strategy session in August 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to review and update the association's long-term strategic plan. The process served to affirm MEUW's mission and priorities, and also helped to identify key areas of short-term focus. In the time since, two working groups have helped to spearhead efforts intended to strengthen the association's foundation and set a path for the future.

These working groups bring together board members, utility leaders, and MEUW staff to provide input, share perspectives, and advocate for actions that build a broader level of engagement to focus MEUW's efforts supporting Wisconsin's public power utilities.



A working group focused on **Member Engagement** is exploring ways to enhance the value of membership, foster stronger connections across communities, and ensure that MEUW's programs, services, and communications align with members' needs. The group is chaired by George Morrissey (Cuba City).

Another group is driving efforts intent on **Expanding Advocacy** among MEUW members. The team, chaired by Troy Adams (Manitowoc), has focused on ways to increase members' involvement in MEUW's advocacy efforts, by providing members with information and tools to build their own utilities' presence and influence with policymakers, regulatory agencies, as well as other key stakeholders (see article on page 5 for recent examples).

Both groups have been meeting regularly and are making progress on specific initiatives. Early conversations have already generated ideas that will help MEUW provide greater support to members and position the organization for long-term impact.

Aside from the working groups, the Board approved plans designed to ensure the continuity of MEUW's operations in the event of turnover in key positions. The "succession" plans focus on the process to identify and select individuals to fill critical roles that include President and CEO and Electric Utility Safety and Training Coordinator. Each plan provides specifics about essential skill sets and core competencies required to effectively support MEUW's mission.

While significant progress has been made in the last year, the work is just getting started. The association's Strategic Plan is a "living document" that is designed to be regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect the evolving needs of MEUW members and the industry. Ongoing engagement is critical to ensuring the long-term success of MEUW. The plan is available [here](#). ●

WPPI Energy marking 45 years of joint action

Faced with repeated wholesale rate increases from investor-owned utilities in the early 1970s, Wisconsin's municipal electric utilities came together to pursue power-supply independence. Their goal was to control costs through joint action — and that determination set the stage for what would become WPPI Energy.

In 1974, MEUW formed a Generation and Transmission (G&T) Committee to help make joint action a reality. Working with the Boardman & Clark law firm, the committee established Wisconsin Public Power, Inc. (WPPI), a nonprofit corporation created to advocate for legislation enabling any two

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Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin's mission is to **strengthen and unify community-owned utilities**. Since 1928, MEUW has been the trade association for Wisconsin's 81 public power communities and is affiliated with the American Public Power Association (APPA) — www.publicpower.org

Continued from page 1

municipalities with electric utilities to form a new power supplier, known as a municipal electric company (MEC).

Momentum quickly built. In April 1976, WPPI hosted a pivotal meeting in the basement of a Sun Prairie supper club, laying the groundwork for passage of the joint-action bill. Within a year, the legislation passed with nearly unanimous lawmaker support. Joint action was alive and well in Wisconsin; the state's first MEC, the predecessor to what is today the Upper Midwest Municipal Energy Group (UMMEG), formed in 1978.

On Sept. 5, 1980, Wisconsin Public Power, Inc. SYSTEM was officially incorporated. More than 25 communities quickly joined, assigning their existing power supply contracts to the new entity and committing to a shared future. The organization grew steadily, acquiring ownership in power generation facilities across the Midwest and, in 1999, becoming the first transmission-dependent utility in the country to buy into the newly formed American Transmission Company, which today simply calls itself ATC.



Over the decades, WPPI continued to evolve. In 1990, its name was simplified to Wisconsin Public Power, Inc., and in 2008, reflecting its expansion into Iowa and Michigan, it became WPPI Energy. Today, 51 member-owners — including 41 in Wisconsin — work together to serve 200,000 homes and businesses in three states. Half of MEUW's member utilities are also WPPI members, and WPPI employees participate in MEUW events as Affiliate Members of the association.

Through the years, MEUW and WPPI have maintained a strong partnership to support Wisconsin's municipal electric utilities. Many of the same leaders who guided MEUW's advocacy in the 1970s are recognized in WPPI's Joint Action Hall of Fame. Recognizing the commonality of mission, MEUW and WPPI regularly collaborate on regulatory and legislative activities, including the annual legislative rally in Washington, D.C. organized by the American Public Power Association (APPA). Wisconsin is always well represented in visits with federal lawmakers, thanks in large part to WPPI's support as a strong advocate of public power. ●

Refreshed website now live!

Eagle-eyed MEUW members may have noticed things look a little different at www.meuw.org. MEUW recently debuted a refreshed website, including information presented in an easier-to-read font and enhanced views into events. The updated site also includes advertising spaces to enable MEUW Associate Members more opportunities to connect with utility members. More and more visitors are using their smartphone to access the site, so the content and navigation have been refreshed to be more mobile friendly. However, even with the new look, navigation and functionality should feel familiar. Check it out!

In July, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed legislation,



which Governor Tony Evers signed as 2025 Wisconsin Act 12. The law requires the state's Public Service Commission (PSC) to study and commission a nuclear power citing study. As part of the legislation, PSC could request from the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) an appropriation to complete the study and subsequent report. In late August, the JFC approved 13-0 a PSC request of a \$2 million supplemental appropriation to complete the required study. MEUW — along with WPPI Energy, Great Lakes Utilities, and the Upper Midwest Municipal Energy Group (UMMEG) — expressed support for the PSC appropriation request in a memo to members of the JFC. To learn more, contact MEUW's Tyler Vorpapel at (920) 265-7720.

Public Power Week is time to celebrate



The first full week in October is always a special time for MEUW and its member utilities — Public Power Week! Oct. 6–10 is a great time to celebrate what makes public power special — offering local control, not-for-profit, exceptionally reliable service to more than 300,000 customers across Wisconsin.

New for this year's events, American Public Power Association (APPA) has created a new [video](#) — "Public Power: 2,000 Utilities. One Purpose." The engaging animated short colorfully describes how the purpose of building strong communities unites public power utilities nationwide. Find the video on APPA's website [here](#).

Please share photos of what your utility is doing to celebrate Public Power Week. Send them to news@meuw.org or tag #MEUW in your social media posts. ●



MEUW NEWS Monitor

Don't miss the annual Accounting and Customer Service Seminar

On Wednesday, Sept. 24, municipal electric utility staff will gather from across the state to discuss accounting and customer service topics. Attendees receive updates on regulatory and legislative topics that affect their utilities and compare best practices to improve their operations. MEUW's Accounting and Customer Service Committee assists MEUW staff in putting together the day's program to address industry topics. Registration and the day's agenda are located [here](#).

Register for "District Dinners" planned across the state this fall

Getting members together for dinner and networking is a time-honored MEUW tradition, and registration is open for the 2025 District Dinners, which are now being held every other year. Eight dinners are planned across the state. MEUW members are encouraged to bring commission or council members and attend whichever scheduled dinner is most convenient (whether it is in their district or not). It's a great opportunity to connect with colleagues from the public power community and to hear the latest happenings with MEUW and the industry. There is no cost to attend, although pre-registration is required. Each dinner begins with a cash bar at 6 p.m. and dinner at 6:30, followed by a brief program. Full details are available [here](#).

Refine your communications and project-management skills

Mastering strategic communication and project management isn't just useful — it's the backbone of a thriving municipal utility. By completing a one-day training that is part of MEUW's [Fundamentals of Utility Leadership Management series](#), municipal utility professionals will equip themselves with essential communication and project-management skills to enhance operational success. Participants will learn to effectively plan and prioritize tasks, provide constructive feedback, and track projects to ensure nothing is overlooked.

The class emphasizes clear communication — both in giving directions and active listening — to foster meaningful feedback and understanding. Registration is now open for the Oct. 8 class [here](#).

December training focuses on consistency

MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate Program continues with another class later this year, "Leading with Consistency." The topic is being offered because consistency was identified as a critical competency for municipal utility leaders.

The one-day leadership development course focuses on why consistency is essential to being an effective utility leader. The training will be held Wednesday, Dec. 3, in Mauston. Participants will learn practical tactics they can apply to become a consistent leader and learn how consistency can inspire people to work toward a common goal. Click [here](#) for details.

Training offered through MEUW's Professional Development Program will continue in 2026. To learn more about the two training tracks available to municipal employees of all skill levels, visit meuw.org/pdp. Specific training dates for the new year are expected to be set no later than Oct. 1.

Underground Facility Locator Workshop planned for spring

MEUW will once again offer an Underground Facility Locator Workshop in 2026. The workshop will be held April 1 in Spooner, and will cover information found in Units 1-3 of the National Utility Locating Contractors Association (NULCA) Professional Competency Standard including locating theory and use of the transmitter and receiver. The workshop will include both classroom instruction and hands-on practice locating, using a variety of techniques outside. All learners will receive a certificate documenting the training received. Mark your calendars — registration will open early next year. ●

Renowned safety speaker to share message at EOCE26

Planning is well under way for the 2026 Electric Operations Conference and Expo, which will be held Jan. 14 and 15 at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. Brandon Schroeder has been confirmed as a keynote speaker at the event. A journeyman electrician, Brandon's journey as a safety speaker began in 2012, following a life-altering workplace accident that nearly claimed his life. One decision to take a shortcut on the job changed everything.

You won't want to miss Brandon's inspirational story — or the rest of the programming, trade show, and networking opportunities. Mark your calendars to join your municipal utility colleagues and representatives of Wisconsin's electric cooperatives at EOCE26 — registration will open Oct. 15.

Start your week safely with **MEUW safety reminder emails**. Use the topics as discussion starters in meetings throughout the week. Always keep safety top-of-mind — sign up to have the safety reminders delivered to your in-box [here](#).

Municipal employees earn certificate for completing leadership program

Three MEUW members recently took the next step in their professional development journeys. Pictured below are: **Jake Tanner** (Columbus Utilities), **Scott Gald** (City Utilities of Richland Center), and **Dalton Hiley** (Columbus Utilities), who were recognized during a recent training session held in Mauston.



Each of them has now completed MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Training program. The certificate program focuses on a set of core competencies essential to success as a leader in a municipal utility setting. Training is designed for new, emerging, and seasoned leaders, managers, and supervisors. To learn more about professional development opportunities, visit meuw.org/pdp.

Members' *NEWS*



Anthony Downing was recently selected as Director of Public Works for the City of Fennimore. He succeeds **Jordan Fritche**, who has moved to a Lineworker position. Downing has been with the City since 2022, and worked both in the Streets and Utility departments.

Also in Fennimore, **Brennan Udelhofen** has joined as an Apprentice Lineworker.

Send us your news! Tell MEUW about new hires, promotions, retirements, honors, and awards, so those tidbits can be shared in MEUW member communications. Simply send an email to news@meuw.org to share your news.



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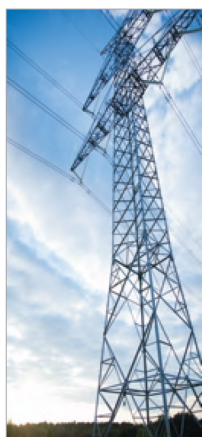


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Advocacy in Action: Simple connections, real impact

Advocacy helps protect and strengthen public power — and it doesn't always take years to see results. Recent experiences among MEUW members demonstrate how even simple conversations can create momentum and open doors.

From Talking Points to Policy:

Several years ago, Michael Avanzi (Kaukauna Utilities) attended the APPA Rally in Washington, D.C., where he raised supply chain challenges in a meeting with former Congressman Mike Gallagher. Not long after, Rep. Gallagher introduced legislation to address supply chain reform. That early conversation demonstrates how putting our top issues in front of policymakers can directly shape the bills that move forward.

Making Connections in Manitowoc:

When Gov. Tony Evers visited Manitowoc, he toured local facilities and spent meaningful time discussing the city's power plant and renewable fuel efforts. He even took fuel samples back to Madison and connected Manitowoc Public Utilities (MPU) with his Green Energy Committee. From there, MPU gained an ally working on their behalf — at no additional cost — to advance projects, access grant funding, and reduce landfill waste while keeping dollars in Wisconsin. The utility also built connections with the new Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. While the outcomes are still developing, the key takeaway is clear: relationships open doors to opportunities that wouldn't otherwise exist.

Accessing Needed Funding: Earlier this year, Kaukauna Utilities (KU) hosted Congressman Tony Wied (R-Wis. 8th), giving him a tour of their facilities, including the new water plant. He met with staff and commissioners, and afterward helped secure a \$1 million federal

appropriation for KU. He also gave Kaukauna Mayor Tony Penterman his personal cell phone number — demonstrating the lasting value of making those in-person connections.



Engaging State Leaders:

Bruce Gomm (Shawano Municipal Utilities) knows the importance of maintaining relationships with state leaders. When he reached out to Rep. Elijah Behnke (R-Town of Chase) to offer a tour,

Behnke was grateful for the opportunity to see firsthand what the utility does. These kinds of proactive invitations make future policy discussions more productive and meaningful. *(See article at right for another example.)*

Showing Up Matters: At the APPA Policymakers Council in July, members met with U.S. Senator Ron Johnson and Representatives Glenn Grothman (R-Wis. 6th) and Tom Tiffany (R-Wis. 7th), among others. Some meetings were face-to-face, others with staff — but every conversation helped raise awareness of public power's priorities. MEUW and WPPI Energy also co-hosted a reception at the National Conference of State Legislators in Boston, connecting with policymakers from across the country.

Preparing for What's Ahead: With significant change underway at the federal level, members stressed the importance of staying informed about what new policies mean for public power, both the good and the bad. Efforts are underway to prepare a summary for members.

Looking ahead, we encourage every utility leader to find at least one opportunity to talk with a policymaker before November. These conversations don't have to be formal — sometimes they start with a tour, a townhall meeting, or simply an invitation to connect. Because when it comes to advocacy, relationships matter.

Building bridges in Trempealeau: A testament to advocacy

When the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) announced plans to close all three bridges connecting Trempealeau to La Crosse for up to two years, the impact would have been devastating. Emergency response times, local tourism, and the community's access to essential services were all at risk.



Recognizing the stakes, local leaders pushed back. **Isaac Pooler**, Village Administrator and Finance Director in

Trempealeau, first insisted that DOT hold a public meeting in Trempealeau (not in surrounding communities) where there was little awareness and engagement. After two years of persistence, that meeting finally happened, drawing record attendance. From there, the Village organized a coordinated advocacy effort: writing campaigns to legislators, a community webpage with contact information for representatives, and even a county resolution.

The result? DOT changed course and will now maintain traffic during bridge replacements, keeping critical pathways open for emergency and community traffic alike.

Every conversation strengthens public power — and as our members' stories show, those connections can lead to real results. If you have an experience, idea, or tip to share, we want to hear it! Please take a moment to answer a [few brief questions](#) to let us know what you are doing. ●

Jefferson welcomes big flavor — and new big customers



By Karen Whitmer

Situated conveniently between Madison and Milwaukee, the City of Jefferson has long been known for its small-town charm, scenic river views, and

strong sense of community.

A few years ago, the city embraced the tagline “We’re Going Outside” to highlight its natural beauty and active lifestyle. With the Rock River and the Glacial River Trail cutting through town, Jefferson offers more parks and green spaces than most cities its size — making it a destination for residents and visitors who love the outdoors.

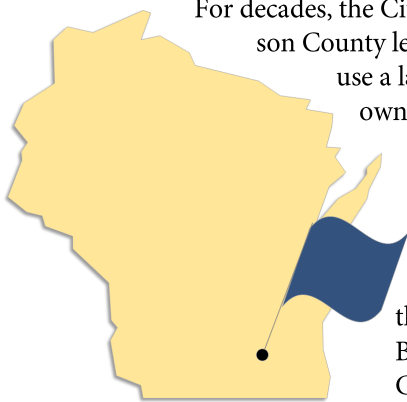
But Jefferson is more than a place to enjoy the outdoors — it’s also a community preparing for growth.

Home to about 8,000 residents, the city takes pride in operating its own electric, water, and wastewater utilities. The electric utility serves roughly 4,400 customers — including 84% residential — and is managed by the city’s Electric Utility Commission. A team of 10 full-time and two part-time employees maintains system reliability and supports the growing community’s needs.

“We know what we have is special,” said Sarah Hinze, Electric Utility Business Manager for Jefferson Utilities. “People from bigger cities keep moving here because we offer a quaint community with a small-town feel, yet residents can travel 45 minutes east or west to those bigger cities.”

While Jefferson remains close-knit, it is now positioning itself for a larger role in the region’s future — creating new demands and new opportunities for its utility systems.

Powering up for growth



For decades, the City of Jefferson and Jefferson County leaders debated how best to use a large tract of county-owned land along Highway 26.

The idea of a food and beverage hub had circulated since the 1990s, but in 2024 the vision finally came to life with the launch of the Food and Beverage (FAB) Innovation Campus.

By creating a dedicated industrial park, Jefferson is now attracting global food companies, encouraging investment, and diversifying the tax base. According to Hinze, it is also generating new jobs and opportunities for the community.

The Campus is strategically located on Jefferson’s south side, with easy rail and highway connections. Kikkoman Foods, Inc. was the first to commit, purchasing 100 acres of the 175-acre campus to build a \$560 million, 240,000-square-foot soy sauce facility. Groundbreaking took place in June 2024, instantly establishing the Tokyo-based company as the FAB’s anchor tenant. Just months later, Finnish food-tech startup



Called a “hidden gem in the Midwest,” the online travel blog WondrousDrifter.com says, “Jefferson has it all.”

Onego Bio signed on as the second tenant, announcing plans to break ground on a new \$195 million facility later this year—with more announcements expected soon.

“Just these two companies alone will bring an estimated additional 20 megawatts of power load to our utility,” Hinze noted. “That’s a big shift for a community utility—and it means new infrastructure and long-term planning to keep pace. We’ve been very busy laying the groundwork to make the FAB successful.”

Nick Baumann, Jefferson Utilities’ Electric Line Superintendent, added that the entire electric team has been working hard to meet this demand. “We are working around the clock to make sure the infrastructure is in place for Kikkoman and all potential new customers,” Baumann said. “The growth we’re seeing is exciting, but it also means planning carefully, upgrading our systems, and staying one step ahead so our customers continue to have the reliable, affordable service they count on.”

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Longtime partners in industry

The FAB isn't Jefferson's first experience with major industry. Its oldest and largest industrial partner is Nestlé Purina PetCare, which has operated in Jefferson since 1910. The plant produces some of Purina's most popular wet-pet-food brands, including Pro Plan, Fancy Feast, and Beneful IncrediBites. In April 2024, Purina announced a \$195 million expansion to boost production capacity by nearly 50% and add 100 new jobs.

Americold Logistics is another key player, operating a state-of-the-art cold storage facility in Jefferson. The company provides refrigerated warehousing and distribution services that keep perishable goods moving across the Midwest. Together, these businesses make Jefferson a quiet but powerful hub for food production and supply chain logistics.

Growth isn't limited to industry, either. Jefferson Utilities, a member of WPPI Energy, has been also busy installing new underground infrastructure to support residential development, including a 56-lot subdivision near the local golf course and three new 16-unit family housing projects. "As jobs expand, so do neighborhoods — and the City and Jefferson Utilities are planning ahead," Hinze said.

The spirit of Gemütlichkeit

Amid all this change, Jefferson hasn't lost sight of what makes it special. Known as the Gemütlichkeit City, it embraces a German word that translates loosely to warmth, friendliness, and good cheer. Each September, those qualities are on full display during Gemütlichkeit Days, a three-day festival filled with food, music, and dancing that draws visitors from across the region.



Jefferson also celebrates the diversity its industries bring. "We enjoy celebrating Fiesta Latina and this year the first Kik-

koman Family Picnic," Hinze said. "These have become community-wide events that all residents can enjoy."

At the center of town, the Rock River provides a natural gathering place. Early settlers built around the river for its power and water, but today it's also a recreational treasure — where residents boat, fish, and "float" on summer days.



The line crew at Jefferson Utilities includes (from left to right): Lead Lineman Nick Mueller, Electric Line Superintendent Nick Baumann, Apprentice Lineman Colton Schmidt, and Lineman Jacob Percival. Lineman Nick Ganser is not pictured.

In Jefferson, "floating" refers to hopping on an inner tube, kayak, or canoe and drifting down the Rock River to reach an event or gathering spot along the water.



Since the river runs through town — and past community parks, the fairgrounds, Goat Island, and even downtown—residents can literally float their way to concerts, festivals, and community celebrations.

"It's part of the town's outdoorsy, river-centered lifestyle and ties in nicely with our 'We're Going Outside' tagline," Hinze said.

Tradition also runs deep. Since the 1850s, the Jefferson County Fair has been the highlight of summer, turning the fairgrounds into the county's living room each July. From livestock shows and 4-H projects to concerts, carnival rides, and demolition derbies, the fair blends agricultural roots with modern entertainment.

"Jefferson is a special place," Hinze said. "We're close to big cities, but life here is comfortable and easygoing. The people are hardworking, genuine, and fun-loving. It's a great place to be, and Jefferson Utilities is proud to be a part of it all."

"That balance of economic ambition and everyday quality of life is what makes Jefferson stand out — not just as a place to do business, but as a community where people want to put down roots." ●

Karen Whitmer is a regular contributor to LIVE LINES; she is freelance communicator based in the Fox Valley.

Get to know a little about some Wisconsin lawmakers



This regular feature helps readers get to know Wisconsin elected officials and better understand their views on policies that may impact municipal utilities.

Rep. Sortwell serves on Energy and Utilities Committee



Shae Sortwell (R-Two Rivers) has served as the representative for Wisconsin's 2nd Assembly

District since January 2019. This district includes areas within Manitowoc and Brown Counties.

Sortwell has been a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly's Energy and Utilities Committee since the 2023–2024 legislative session and will continue in this role for 2025–2026. He also serves as chair of the Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform and vice-chair of the Assembly Committee on Government Operations, Accountability, and Transparency. He is also a member of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety, Insurance, and Sporting Heritage committees.

Born in Saratoga Springs, New York, Sortwell moved with his family to the Town of Gibson (in Manitowoc County) as a teenager, while his father was in the U.S. Navy. He attended the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, earning a bachelor's degree in public administration and political science in 2006. While in college, he was active in student government, participated in the College Republicans, and founded a pro-life student organization.

After graduating, Sortwell joined the U.S. Army Reserve in the Chemical Corps, serving for nearly 10 years and reaching the rank of sergeant before finishing his service in 2018. During this period, he also served in local government, including positions on the Green Bay City Council, as a town supervisor on the Gibson Town Board, and as a legislative aide to State Representative Chad Weininger.

Sortwell was elected to the Gibson Town Board of Supervisors in 2017 and to the State Assembly in 2018.

Outside of public office, Sortwell has worked as a truck driver. He currently lives in Gibson with his wife, Krista, and their six children. In his personal time, he enjoys hunting, fishing, and spending time with his family.

Rep. McCarville brings utility work experience to new role representing 42nd District



Maureen McCarville (D-DeForest) began representing Wisconsin's 42nd Assembly

District in January 2025. Located in south-central Wisconsin, the district includes much of southern Columbia County, parts of northern Dane County, and communities such as Columbus, Lodi, DeForest, and Windsor.

Originally from Rockford, Ill., McCarville has lived in DeForest since the early 1980s. She earned a bachelor's degree from Upper Iowa University and spent more than a decade working in accounting at Madison Gas & Electric. Her dedication to service extends beyond her professional career — she served 10 years in the Wisconsin National Guard, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to public service.

McCarville's political career began locally, with a seat on the DeForest Village Board from 1999 to 2003, followed by service on the DeForest Police and Fire Commission from 2001 to 2012. In 2012, she was elected to the Dane County Board of Supervisors for District 22, a role she continues to hold today.

At the state Capitol, McCarville serves on the Energy and Utilities Committee, the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, and the Assembly Committee on Rules. She co-authored Assembly Joint Resolution 70, which designated June 12, 2025, as Women Veterans Day in Wisconsin. According to her website, her legislative priorities focus on supporting working families, strengthening community safety, advancing women's healthcare, protecting water quality, and promoting regional economic growth.

Outside of public service, McCarville enjoys spending time with her large extended family and giving back through community events and volunteer work. She continues to reside in DeForest. ●

Share your input to help MEUW plan the next "Day at the Capitol" event

MEUW staff are putting together plans for 2026 events, including the 2026 Annual Conference (to be held in Madison May 13-15), and other advocacy events. Member feedback is always helpful in planning, so we invite you to take a few minutes share your thoughts and ideas by completing [this brief survey](#).



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Inflation Reduction Act rebate programs delivering big savings

This August marked one year since Wisconsin launched Home Energy Rebate programs funded by the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and delivered by Focus on Energy. The results have been impactful for residents, including customers served by municipal utilities. Home Efficiency Rebates (HOMES) and Home Electrification and Appliance Rebate (HEAR) have helped thousands of residents make energy-efficient upgrades while reducing their energy usage and improving home comfort.

Since the programs have been launched, municipal utility customers across Wisconsin have received over \$200,000 in rebates for energy-saving home improvements. Statewide, more than 2,000 households have benefited from the IRA Home Energy Rebate programs, receiving over \$3 million in total rebates. This includes both HOMES and HEAR participants, demonstrating growing awareness and demand for energy efficiency across communities.

HOMES, launched in August 2024, provides rebates to any resident for whole-home energy improvements that achieve at least 20% energy savings. These upgrades, such as insulation, air sealing, and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, must be modeled through a home energy assessment and installed by an IRA Registered Contractor. HOMES is now piloting an expansion to include multifamily buildings to serve more diverse housing types and populations.

In December 2024, Wisconsin launched the HEAR program, available to low- and moderate-income households. HEAR provides rebates for qualified electric appliances and upgrades such as heat pump water heaters, induction stoves, and electric panel improvements. Eligible residents can receive up to \$14,000 in rebates to cover project costs, making beneficial home electrification more accessible than ever.

HEAR rebates require installation by an IRA Registered Contractor. However, starting later this year, eligible customers will be able to claim rebates by purchasing qualified products directly from participating retailers. This expansion will offer more flexibility and convenience for customers, especially those in rural areas that may have limited access to IRA Registered Contractors.

IRA Home Energy Rebate programs offer multiple benefits. They help reduce peak demand, improve grid reliability, and support local contractors and jobs. Utilities can play a key role in educating customers about rebate eligibility and assisting with recruitment of IRA Registered Contractors in their territories.

“The Home Energy Rebate Programs are a win, win, win for Wisconsin and we are excited to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the program launch,” said Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) Chairperson Summer Strand. “In the last year, Wisconsin households across the state have stepped up to utilize these rebates to save energy, save money, and support our workforce. Under Governor Evers’ leadership, significant progress has been made, but the work is far from over. Home energy rebates remain available. We encourage additional Wisconsin households to undertake energy efficient upgrades and reap the many benefits of the Home Energy Rebate Programs.”

The success of the Home Energy Rebate programs reflects a strong partnership between many stakeholders across Wisconsin including, the PSC, the Governor’s office, Focus on Energy, IRA Registered Contractors, utilities, and local governments and community-based organizations. As the programs continue to evolve, municipal utilities are well-positioned to help expand access, drive participation, and deliver lasting energy savings to their communities.

In addition to the IRA Home Energy Rebates, customers may be eligible for savings through other programs, including [Focus on Energy rebates and discounts](#), the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#), and [tax credits](#). Focus on Energy’s [Get Started](#) tool helps customers identify what programs they are eligible for and maximize savings. ●

Focus on Energy is a sponsor of MEUW’s **Accounting and Customer Service Seminar** on Sept. 24. The full agenda and registration information is available [here](#).

MEUW provides Focus on Energy the opportunity to regularly contribute content to LIVE LINES because of the organizations’ shared support of municipal utilities.



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Residential energy sales soon to be tax-exempt year-round

A new law signed in July makes residential electricity and natural gas usage exempt from the state sales tax year-round. Previously, energy usage was tax exempt only during the months of November through April, when home heating is considered an essential service. This change is expected to result in approximately \$178 million in savings statewide for utility customers over the next two years. The sales tax exemption takes effect Oct. 1.

The Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) has provided guidance to implement the new exemption. DOR said the exemption is based on the bill date, not the usage or meter reading date. Electricity or natural gas is considered "sold" at the time of billing. This means:

- Bills issued before Oct. 1, 2025: Tax applies, even if some or all of the usage occurred in October.
- Bills issued on or after Oct. 1, 2025: Tax exemption applies, even if some of the usage occurred in September.
- Mid-month billing cycles (e.g., Sept. 15 – Oct. 15): If the bill is dated prior to Oct. 1, sales tax must still be charged on the entire billing period.

The interpretation is outlined in Wis. Stat. § 77.54(30)(b) and Wis. Adm. Code Tax 11.57(2)(n).

These rules also apply to any county's 0.5% sales tax.

This article originally appeared in the August 2025 LIVE LINES.

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