

LIVE Lines

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MEUW members discuss issues with state, federal lawmakers

February featured two opportunities to showcase Wisconsin’s municipal utilities to both state and federal lawmakers, and MEUW members participated fully in sharing key messages to legislators and their staffs in Madison and Washington, D.C. Representatives of 31 municipalities took part in MEUW’s Day at the Capitol on Feb. 5 and the annual Legislative Rally organized by the American Public Power Association (APPA) held Feb. 24-26 in Washington, D.C., including some that attended both advocacy events.

“MEUW was originally organized to ensure municipal utilities had a seat at the table in state politics,” said MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich. “Our founders undoubtedly would be proud to witness the high level of engagement among the current membership — in the state capitol and in our nation’s capital, as well. We had important messages to share with lawmakers

in Madison and D.C., and we couldn’t be happier with the impressive showing from all corners of the state.”

Early in the month, MEUW organized the “lobby day” in Madison to meet with lawmakers to educate and inform them about the vital role played by public power utilities in our state. After a brief informational session to review the issues and talk-



Top photo: Wisconsin Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu (right) welcomed MEUW members in the Senate Chambers for the “Day at the Capitol” on Feb. 5; Bottom photo: City of River Falls Utility Director Kevin Westhuis (left) thanked Sen. Tammy Baldwin (seated at right) for her support of municipal utilities as other members of the Wisconsin delegation looked on in the Senator’s Capitol Hill office during the APPA Legislative Rally on Feb. 26.

ing points, small groups made their way to the Capitol to visit Senate and Assembly offices for pre-arranged meetings with legislators and their staffs. MEUW members took part in 60 meetings with nearly 70 legislative offices to discuss matters of importance to municipal electric utilities. Among the topics discussed was the “Right of First Refusal” (ROFR) bill that addresses the rights of incumbent transmission facility owners to construct, own, and maintain certain transmission lines, especially those shared regionally (see sidebar on page 3). Other meeting topics included the workload at the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the positive impact of adopting a simplified rate-case process for electric rates similar to what is currently in place for water rate cases, as well as discussions about community solar and electric-vehicle charging stations.

As a result of redistricting and the outcome of

November’s elections, 28% of the state legislature has turned over, either with first-timers or lawmakers who have switched chambers for the new legislative session. This dynamic offered an opportunity for municipal utilities to make an impression on new (and returning) members of the Wisconsin Senate and Assembly. Those participating included a mix of mayors, utility managers, commissioners and council members, and joint action agencies.

Ryan Roehrborn, Electric Superintendent for Plymouth Utilities, participated in the

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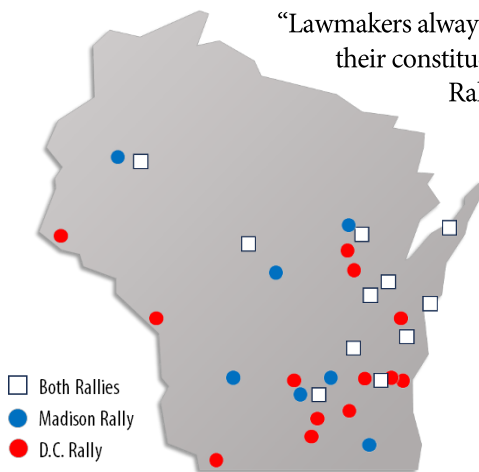
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Day at the Capitol for a second time, having represented his community for MEUW's 95th anniversary celebration in October 2023. He said the experience was well worth the time.

"The utility business is technical and complex, and most elected officials have very little understanding about what happens when they flip on a light switch," Roehrborn said. "As the experts in what we do, meetings like these are a chance to explain our business and educate the decisionmakers about the public power perspective — on everything from reliability and the grid to transmission, solar, and EVs."

Later in February, public power leaders from across the country gathered in D.C. for APPA's Legislative Rally. Sixty Wisconsinites representing 24 Wisconsin municipalities joined group meetings to educate federal lawmakers about public power's policy priorities and the work their utilities do in the communities. This year's delegation included 12 Wisconsin mayors.

Meetings took place Feb. 25 and 26 in the congressional office buildings surrounding the U.S. Capitol. Attendees took part in small-group meetings with five of Wisconsin's eight Members of Congress and/or their staff. The group also met separately with U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D) and Ron Johnson (R), and discussed a number of current issues, including tax exemptions for municipal bonds (*see sidebar*), ongoing supply chain challenges, and permitting reform, among other topics.



Representatives from 31 of the 81 Wisconsin municipalities that own and operate their own electric utility took part in advocacy efforts in February, including 13 who traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby federal lawmakers for the American Public Power Association's 2025 Legislative Rally, seven who came to Madison for MEUW's "Day at the Capitol" on 2/5/25, and 11 who took part in both events.

"Lawmakers always enjoy hearing from their constituents, and the APPA

Rally is a great opportunity to have focused discussions about issues that matter to municipal utilities," said Heinrich. "Wisconsin always has an impressive showing, and the level of engagement makes a real difference in APPA's efforts to influence legislators and policy."

The annual APPA event is the most concentrated effort of the year for public power ad-

Federal tax reform threatens municipal bonds

Tax-exempt municipal bonds are an incredibly efficient financing tool, reducing state and local borrowing costs, and helping to finance nearly 75% of the nation's core infrastructure. Despite their popularity and efficacy, municipal bonds often face scrutiny when tax reform is on the table, as it is in 2025.

Given their importance to the vitality of communities nationwide, public power utilities oppose any attempt to tax municipal bond interest as well as any attempt to limit current uses of municipal bonds. The federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 includes provisions that expire at the end of 2025, which means a significant tax-policy debate with major budget implications will happen this year.

The debate will focus on how to pay for lost revenue from extending the tax cuts. During the last examination of tax cuts, tax-exempt bonds were looked at for potential reforms and they are expected to be a source of debate again.

If the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds ends, the effect will be increased costs for public power projects. APPA has been actively lobbying Congress in defending municipal bonds, especially with the need for more infrastructure investment driven by the increased demand for electricity due to artificial intelligence data centers and other electrification efforts.

Municipalities have issued bonds since at least the 1100s when Venice, Italy, used them to finance military operations. In the U.S., about three-quarters of core infrastructure investments have been financed through state and local government bonds. Since 2014, nearly \$70 billion in municipal bonds have been issued to finance public power investments, ranging from generating facilities to substations, operating centers, and more. The bonds — which commonly have a 30-year term — are debt that municipalities take on to finance various projects that will serve the community for decades. Investors essentially lend money by purchasing the bonds and then earn interest on the money they invest. At the end of the bond's term, the investors get their money back.

vocacy, with three days of meeting with national policymakers and their staff members to share how federal policy matters affect their communities. Wisconsin's delegation — which also includes representatives of WPPI Energy and Great Lakes Utilities — is typically among the largest from any state to participate.

Aside from meetings with legislators and their staff, the Rally also features topical breakout sessions and the APPA Legislative and Resolutions Committee Luncheon. This year's pro-

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gram included a presentation by Jonathan Martin, Politics Bureau Chief and Senior Political Columnist with POLITICO, who addressed the federal political environment and the issues shaping politics and policy.

Kaukauna Utilities Commission Chairman Lee Meyerhofer, who also serves as Chair of APPA's Policymakers Council, is a regular at APPA events and attended this year's Legislative Rally. In a recent podcast interview, he told APPA, "The Rally gives board members a chance to get exposed to the national issues facing

ROFR law estimated to save Wisconsin energy consumers up to \$1 billion

Without a change to Wisconsin law, transmission projects will be competitively bid under federal regulatory processes that allow out-of-state investors to build, own, and control parts of Wisconsin's transmission system, potentially leading to lengthy delays, and impacts to the efficiency, reliability, and cost of the grid. The "Right of First Refusal" (ROFR) bill — SB-028 and AB-025 (Transmission Facilities) — addresses the rights of incumbent transmission facility owners to construct, own, and maintain certain transmission lines, especially those shared regionally.

Lawmakers considered an earlier version of ROFR in the last session, however, this new version includes (1) a revised definition of "incumbent" transmission provider aimed at resolving legal challenges in other states; (2) a requirement that incumbent transmission owners report project costs charged to energy consumers outside Wisconsin to various government stakeholders; and (3) a provision that will allow the bill to sunset after 10 years. The Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), the regional grid operator, is moving forward with a significant expansion of the transmission network in the upper Midwest to improve reliability and support economic growth. Part of that expansion includes \$1.8 billion in transmission projects in Wisconsin. This bill will ensure that those projects are built, owned, and operated by Wisconsin utilities.

Municipal utilities support ROFR because, among other benefits, ROFR ensures Wisconsin's power grid decisions remain within the state and keeps critical grid-operation centers local; the Public Service Commission (PSC) would continue to oversee the grid with consumer interests in mind; and the approach maintains competitive bidding for transmission project construction. Supporters of ROFR (www.wi4rofr.org) have estimated Wisconsin ratepayers could save up to \$1 billion over the life of the transmission lines if in-state transmission companies are allowed to build Wisconsin's transmission infrastructure.



our industry, which many times are different than what's at the state level. We view attending the legislative rallies as an investment rather than an expense. It's imperative that members are participating to learn more about best practices and how the industry is being molded and shaped by innovation and legislation and what tomorrow's utility will look like."

MEUW's Director of Legislative and Regulatory Relations Tyler Vorpagel is a registered lobbyist and plays a key role in representing MEUW members to state and federal lawmakers and other regulatory stakeholders.

"Tyler has been a great addition to MEUW," Heinrich said. "Despite his successful work raising public power's profile and strengthening relationships with policymakers, I think he'd be the first to admit that the managers, employees, commissioners, and elected officials who represent their community-owned utilities are the most effective advocates for public power — at both the state and federal levels. And we're grateful that so many of those folks willingly give their time to support MEUW's advocacy work." ●



(1) MEUW members posed for a group photo in the Assembly Chambers ahead of their visits with state lawmakers in Madison; (2) Representatives of Sun Prairie Utilities met with Sen. Melissa Ratcliff (D-Cottage Grove) on Feb. 5 at the state capitol; (3) Rep. Tom Tiffany (R) hosted a group of MEUW members from the 7th Congressional District at his D.C. office on Feb. 25; (4) Members of the Wisconsin delegation were photographed on the steps of the U.S. Capitol during the APPA Rally.

MEUW NEWS Monitor

Member Engagement Survey kicks off this month

Let your voice be heard and tell us how we're doing! MEUW will be conducting another member survey to gather feedback about the services and future direction of the association. The survey link will be sent directly to the key contact on file from each of our member utilities. A separate link will be shared in *MEUW Weekly* to collect feedback from others. The survey is an important part of the association's planning efforts, and the input provided is used to shift priorities and assess progress toward achievement of strategic goals. The survey was last conducted in October 2023 and had a response rate of about 53%. This year's survey period is March 24 to April 25.

Learn how to make the most of "Moments of Truth"

Join your municipal utility colleagues for a 90-minute virtual training session focused on "Moments of Truth" in customer service. This online course — on Thursday, March 13, at 10 a.m. — will delve into how every interaction shapes the customer experience, teaching partic-

ipants to recognize both internal and external customers and the pivotal moments that leave lasting impressions.

Through this training, you'll learn to take ownership of situations, avoid blame, and optimize your impact to provide exceptional service. Upon completion, you'll understand the ripple effect of your actions and how the "Power of One" can drive customer loyalty. Enroll as an individual or register one person from your municipality for group viewing. Details and registration information can be found [here](#).

Foreman's Roundtable set for March 19

The foreman role plays a crucial part in ensuring both safety and efficiency within utility operations. Those leading utility line crews often face similar challenges, yet they rarely have the chance to connect with peers who understand their struggles. The upcoming Foreman's Roundtable aims to provide a platform for electric utility foremen to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and enhance their leadership and communication skills, with a focus on safety.

The event is scheduled to take place at Milford Hills in Johnson Creek, and will feature discussions on topics most relevant to the attendees. After the Roundtable, participants can join an optional teambuilding and networking activity at the hunt club. For registration and more details, click [here](#).

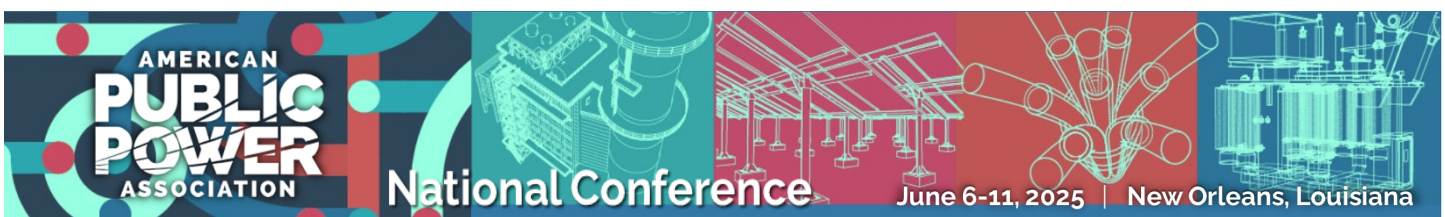
Unlock valuable insights at March 19 Credit and Collections Seminar

If you're looking to sharpen your utility collections processes and stay up-to-date on the latest regulations, make plans to attend the MEUW Credit and Collections Seminar on March 19. The daylong event is held every other year to provide utilities with crucial information and actionable strategies as collections season kicks off with the end of the cold-weather disconnect moratorium. This seminar is designed to help MEUW members compare strategies and learn about trends impacting collections efforts.

The seminar will take place on Wednesday, March 19, in Mauston and includes an informative, action-packed agenda. You'll hear directly from the Public Service Commission (PSC), with a refresher on important topics like disconnections, deferred payment agreements, deposits, and foreclosures. You'll also get the latest updates on energy assistance resources for qualifying customers, and engage in practical discussions on the best techniques and strategies to improve your collections process.

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2025 Foreman's Roundtable Sponsors



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This seminar is a fantastic opportunity to ensure your utility is operating efficiently while supporting customers through the collection process. For full details and to register, click [here](#).

Attend training session to enhance your coaching skills

Effective leaders understand the power of coaching — and how it plays a key role in both personal and organizational success. High-performing leaders develop the emotional intelligence and skills needed to coach others effectively, knowing when to step in and guide their teams. A great coach is also self-aware, understanding the sources of frustration, negative self-talk, and emotional reactions. This self-awareness not only makes you a stronger leader but also sets a positive example for others.

Don't miss the opportunity to elevate your coaching abilities by registering for "Leading Through Coaching," a core part of MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate Program. The workshop will take place on Wednesday, April 2, in Mauston.

To learn more and secure your spot, click [here](#) for details and registration.

Register for Underground School in late April

The reliability of any utility's system is highly dependent on underground cable and the overall quality of its installation. The Underground Distribution (UD) School offers an ideal opportunity for lineworkers to learn and practice hands-on techniques in a simulated field setting in order to sharpen their skills, review practi-

Municipal workers complete MEUW training series

Eight municipal employees from all across Wisconsin were recognized at the Feb. 12 Fundamentals of Utility Management training class held in Mauston. These workers achieved milestones in their professional development journeys by attending MEUW training sessions.

All of those receiving recognition had completed the four-part series by attending the Regulation, Compliance & Safety course offered by MEUW. The "Fundamentals" training series first launched in early 2023 as a successor to MEUW's Management Training Program that began in 2004.

Those recognized at the Feb. 12 session were (pictured below, from left) Julie

Brocker, Billing Clerk (Kaukauna); Dana Karls, Manager of Customer Service and Billing (Waunakee); Bryan Breuning, Crew Leader (Sturgeon Bay); Theresa Ulam, Utility Accounting and Finance (Lake Mills); Jason Sisel, Lineman (Two Rivers); Owen Vande Kolk, Assistant Electric Superintendent (Waupun); Lucas Caine, Senior Engineer (Oconomowoc); and Jordan Peichel, Utility Manager (Cumberland).

Course offerings in the series continue throughout 2025 and beyond. Full details about all of the courses offered through MEUW's Professional Development programming can be found at www.meuw.org/pdp.



cal applications, and safely perform tasks in a controlled environment.

Organized by Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) and MEUW, the event — planned for April 29–May 1 — will include hands-on training both in the classroom and in the underground distribution field on the CVTC campus in Eau Claire. Training is intended for all lineworkers — regardless of experience level.

Planned topics to be covered include safety, underground termination, ferroresonance, and cable prep and handling, along with a discussion of associated accessories (i.e., terminators and splices). Participants will have time to operate equipment, including a backhoe, mini excavator, plow, and trencher. There will also be discussion about working with facility locators and how to locate underground cable. Look for registration details soon. ●



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Proposed changes to individual metering require careful examination



By Richard Heinemann,
Boardman Clark

Within the Wisconsin Administrative Code, PSC 113.0803 requires individual metering for each tenant space in multi-dwelling unit residential buildings and mobile home parks. The requirement — last revised in 2002 — was originally intended to promote energy conservation, ensure that customers are billed for their own energy consumption, and more readily enable utilities to disconnect electric service to individuals without affecting service to other units at a multi-unit property. Exceptions are provided for facilities such as hotels, campgrounds, hospitals, and residential care or community-based residential facilities.

The rule also allows requests for waivers from the individual metering requirement. In recent years, such requests have been making their way to the Public Service Commission (PSC) with increasing frequency (more than 20 dockets since 2017) — both from utilities, including MEUW members, and from individuals or developers.

The waiver requests have been driven by everything from supply chain issues to the surge of interest in solar ener-

gy. In the absence of any clear guidance about how to address the waiver requests, PSC initiated a [scoping statement](#) in 2023 for a proposed rulemaking and authorized Staff to develop [recommendations for amendments to the rule](#). At its Open Meeting on Feb. 12, the three-person Commission approved the draft amendments as presented and directed Staff to implement the public comment phase of the rulemaking process.

Along with Great Lakes Utilities, WPPI Energy, and the Wisconsin Utilities Association, MEUW has been tracking the progress of this rulemaking largely out of a concern that an amended rule could have ramifications from both a utility cost and customer affordability standpoint. Based on a review of the draft amendment, the concern is warranted, and MEUW members should consider [filing written comments](#) by the March 24 deadline.

There is little doubt that the rules need to be updated. The proposed amendment removes provisions that are vague or technologically outmoded, such as the exemption for “electric backup service to storage heating and cooling systems” or the “example cases” of electrically heated buildings or buildings with individual-unit water heaters.

In broader terms, however, the proposed amendment

may have unintended consequences. PSC Staff note loosening the individual metering requirement would likely lower the cost of housing costs while better enabling builders to meet updated efficiency standards. At the same time, it also likely increases costs for utilities and permitting authorities and may also reduce the availability of energy assistance for low-income customers; disincentivize tenants to cut down on their energy use; and potentially create new cross-subsidies as waivers are granted for new rooftop solar facilities on multi-unit dwellings that meet energy-efficiency standards. As a result, without further clarification or refinement, the proposed amendment could be costly for municipal utilities and their customers.

One example is the proposed modification to PSC 113.0803(3), which exempts remodels of existing buildings from the individual metering requirements if there are “legal impediments” to installation of such meters or if the cost of installation exceeds the long-term benefits of such metering. The modification, which invokes the cost-benefit standard for new buildings within the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act (PURPA) and mirrors recent rule revisions approved in neighboring states, is intended to address developer concerns that individual metering is too

costly, impractical or even prohibited by historic preservation rules. It also recognizes that there may be instances where maintaining the individual metering requirement is appropriate for buildings that fail to meet established efficiency standards. But the proposed change more than likely will increase the number of remodeled buildings that seek and obtain waivers, making it uncertain whether the proper policy balance has been struck. There are numerous other examples where the amended rule could increase costs for MEUW members or their customers.

PSC Chair Summer Strand noted that the Commission’s decision to send the proposed rule amendment to public hearing without modification should not be construed as an endorsement of the proposed rules. Instead, she said, this step in the rulemaking process should signal PSC’s desire to solicit additional stakeholder input to inform any modification of the proposed rule. Municipal utilities should take the opportunity to understand the proposed modifications and express their specific concerns by filing written comments by the March 24 deadline.



Richard Heinemann provides legal services to municipalities and local governments

in Wisconsin and throughout the upper Midwest. He serves as MEUW General Counsel.

LIVELines

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This e-newsletter is distributed to more than 1,200 utility professionals and leaders throughout Wisconsin and the Midwest on the first Tuesday of every month.

LIVE LINES has been published continuously for many decades and provides useful information, news on emerging utility issues and legislation, updates on events, training programs and member services, as well as engaging feature stories spotlighting utilities, communities and leaders.

Reader comments and suggestions are welcome — send by email to news@meuw.org

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An archive of past issues of *Live Lines* is available at www.issuu.com/meuw

MEUW Annual Conference set for La Crosse in May

Municipal leaders, utility employees, and public power enthusiasts will gather in La Crosse for MEUW's 95th Annual Conference May 14–16 this year. The meeting will feature discussions on a wide variety of topics including updates on legislative and regulatory issues affecting public power at both the state and national levels. (This is the 95th meeting since its founding in 1928; the conference was not held in 2020 due to the pandemic.)

The annual gathering promises something for everyone, including education, networking, and information-sharing among utility leaders and industry partners from across the state. The program is structured to enable every attendee to get the most out of the conference:

- General sessions designed to bring everyone together on broader issues.
- Breakout sessions offering the opportunity to dive deeper and ask questions about important issues.
- Built-in time for peer discussions about current topics of interest.
- Pre-and post-conference receptions and networking breaks to allow attendees the chance to make and renew connections.

This year's conference will include a scramble-style golf outing on Wednesday, May 14, at Forest Hills Golf Course in La Crosse.

Dairyland Power Cooperative, which is an Affiliate Member of MEUW, will host a tour of its office and facilities, including its System Operations Center, on Wednesday afternoon. Following the tour, Dairyland is sponsoring the conference welcome reception onboard the La Crosse Queen Cruise riverboat.



The main program on Thursday, May 15 (including the lunchtime Awards Ceremony) will be held at the Radisson La Crosse, which is also the recommended lodging location for the events. Reservations at the Radisson La Crosse are currently being accepted. Conference registration will open April 1. ●

Help MEUW honor those who support public power

For more than a quarter century, MEUW has recognized a variety of industry leaders who have contributed to the success of public power in Wisconsin. These individuals have come from utilities across the state, as well as others from outside the membership. The list includes member employees, governing body officials, business partners, and legislators.

MEUW enjoys the opportunity to highlight the many accomplishments of public power leaders and employees, and to share their stories. There is no cost for members to apply for the awards. The nomination process is easy. All that is needed is details about who should be recognized and why. The Awards Committee will help determine the appropriate award category. A full list of eligibility and awards criteria are posted on the [MEUW website](http://www.meuw.org), along with the application form, which is due by March 31. Awards will be presented during a lunchtime ceremony on May 16 at the Annual Conference in La Crosse. ●

Juneau strives to stay ahead of technology, energy demand



By Karen Whitmer

For more than 110 years, the city of Juneau has been operating its own electric utility. But there is nothing old or outdated about this public power provider in Dodge County. It continually embraces new technologies and takes on new projects to ensure the town of about 2,700 people has outstanding electric reliability and service.

“Our utility is aggressive with implementing new electric utility advancements that are available,” said Nick Gahlman, Electric Superintendent of Juneau Utilities. “We are always looking ahead to leverage technology to provide affordable, efficient, and reliable energy for our customers,” he said. Gahlman added the community has a low unplanned outage rate, with the distribution system typically experiencing only one or two outages each year.

Juneau Utilities has about 1,000 residential and 200 commercial electric customers. It also provides residents with water and waste-water services.

Situated just 50 miles northeast of Madison and 65 miles northwest of Milwaukee, the city of Juneau is geographically well-positioned — making it attractive for new businesses and residents. “While we are in a prime location with easy access to major metropolitan areas, we also have everything we need and plenty to do right in Juneau,” Gahlman said.



Gahlman

customer, but it is the biggest employer in the community. It is best known for the Litter-Robot, a self-cleaning litter box that automates the scooping process.

Last September, Whisker acquired a five-acre property adjacent to its existing plant to build an addition, which is expected to create 150 jobs over the next two years. The new addition continues the trend of Whisker’s increased investment in Juneau. The company already expanded twice between 2019 and 2022, adding \$12.5 million of assessed value and 250 new jobs to the area.

Whisker recently donated two “Welcome” signs to the community. Juneau Utilities installed the lighting for the new signs, which recognize Juneau as “Home of the Litter-Robot.”



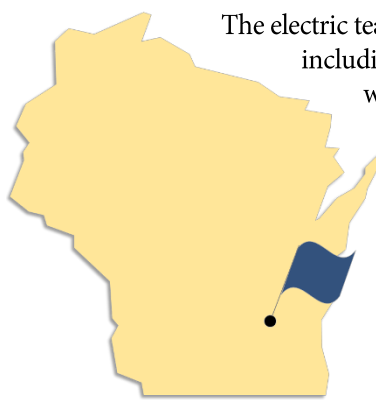
Juneau Utilities’ largest customer is Sensient Flavors & Extracts, a company that specializes in bio-nutrients and processes yeast as an ingredient for the food and pharmaceutical industry.

Other large customers include Glasfloss Industries, which is a well-known manufacturer of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning air filters, and Bullseye Industries, Inc., a Wisconsin Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine shop.

Gahlman added that Juneau is the County Seat for Dodge County and is a hub for legal and governmental activities within the county. Therefore, Juneau Utility serves other large customers, including the Dodge County Courthouse, Dodge County Detention Facility, Dodge County Highway Department, and the Clearview Facility, which provides long-term care, brain injury care, and rehabilitative services.

Commercial growth has also helped to create a slow, but steady growth rate in residential customers as employers bring more workers to town. “Juneau has seen a lot of interest in housing developments recently,” Gahlman said. The city is working closely with interested contractors in developing areas that remain. The Dodge County Housing Authority recently constructed 15 new duplexes named Sunset View, which was funded in part by a Neighborhood Investment Fund grant from the city.

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The electric team includes five employees, including Gahlman and two line-workers, and two who work in the office. The team is known for their commitment to the community and the approachable, knowledgeable service they provide. “Juneau has a strong sense of community and neighborly support,” Gahlman said. “Our people

are deeply integrated and invested in the community. This is our home, and we’re proud to serve and be a part of it.”

Serving a wide range of customers

Various manufacturing plants and businesses rely on Juneau Utilities for their energy needs. Whisker, an innovator in pet technology and refined pet accessories, is not Juneau’s largest

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Ensuring reliability for customers

Juneau Utilities has three substations with a capacity of 16 megawatts and more than 27 miles of overhead and underground lines.

Gahlman and his team currently maintain a 4.16kV system but are working toward converting to a 12.47kV system in the next several years to help meet future demand. According to Gahlman, the team has been working systematically over the last few years in replacing transformers with dual voltage and converting their overhead lines to underground cables in key areas to improve reliability and reduce weather-related outages.

“We stay on track with maintenance, inspection work, and tree trimming to ensure a high level of reliability and customer satisfaction,” Gahlman said.

Juneau Utilities has also focused on adopting modern technologies, including



AMI metering and OpenPoint software. “We’ve had all AMI meters for quite a few years now, and

now we are implementing OpenPoint GIS systems,” Gahlman said. OpenPoint software provides advanced Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping capabilities, allowing utilities to visualize and manage their infrastructure effectively. It also provides support to manage work order, asset, and outage systems. “With this technology, we can quickly identify faults and restore them in a timely manner,” Gahlman said. “While many of the larger municipal utilities already have this technology, we are ahead of the curve among utilities of our size.”

Giving back to the community

Juneau Utility’s efforts go well beyond providing essential services, the team actively works to ensure the well-being of the community and customers they serve. The utility annually gives two schol-

arships, one providing support to a deserving student pursuing further education at a university or two-year technical college and another for a student pursuing a career as an electric lineworker.

During Public Power Week, the electric team provides PowerTOWN demonstrations to teach kids about the importance of staying away from electrical equipment, and how to respond safely in emergency situations.

They also partnered with the National Theatre for Children to bring the “Eco Guardians” program to local schools. This initiative features live performances by professional actors who teach students about energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable resources.

And they’ve been recognized for their efforts. During the 2024 WPPI Energy Annual Meeting, Juneau Utilities was honored with the Community Service Award. Robert “Mac” Affeld, President of Juneau Utility Commission, was specifically honored for his active participation in the community.

“We give back whenever we can,” Gahlman said. “Our team isn’t just invested in the operation and improvement of our utility, they are also invested in the people of Juneau, who are our friends and family.”

Revitalization is in the works

The city of Juneau is now actively working on several projects to enhance its downtown area. The projects are funded by support from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was launched in 2021 to help local governments recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We worked with the city to enhance downtown street lighting,” Gahlman said. “Additionally, the city is making other aesthetic improvements, including upgrading sidewalks and adding green spaces to create a more inviting



The team at Juneau Utilities includes (from left): Utility Accountant Laurie Runyan, Apprentice Lineman Dylan Kohn, Electric Superintendent Nick Gahlman, Apprentice Lineman Nick Koch, and Billing Clerk Pam Manke

atmosphere,” Gahlman said. A gathering plaza, which incorporates an outdoor stage, is also being constructed to draw more community events such as farmers’ markets, festivals, and outdoor concerts.

“We look forward to having a revitalized space downtown to both attract more visitors and to create more opportunities for our residents to come together and socialize,” Gahlman said.

Outdoor recreation is also popular in Juneau, especially exploring the Wild Goose State Trail. This 34.5-mile trail is great for hiking, biking, and bird watching, offering scenic views of the Horicon Marsh and surrounding countryside.



Sunset View, a project funded in part by a Neighborhood Investment Fund grant from the City of Juneau, brought 15 new duplexes to the community

“If you haven’t been to Juneau,” Gahlman said, “come visit. It’s a great destination for those seeking a friendly, small-town vibe with plenty of opportunities for fun and relaxation.” ●

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.

Sen. Jeff Smith serves on Utilities Committee

Jeff Smith (D-Brunswick) represents the 31st District in the Wisconsin Senate, which includes Eau Claire County and parts of Chippewa, Dunn, and Trempealeau counties. He was first elected to the Wisconsin Senate in 2018 and was re-elected in 2022.

He currently serves as the Senate Democratic Assistant Leader. He is the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Health and a member of several other committees, including the Senate Committees on Utilities and Tourism, Organization, and the Joint Committees on Legislative Organization and Legislative Council.

Before his tenure in the Senate, Smith served two terms in the Wisconsin State Assembly from 2007 to 2011, representing the 93rd District.

During his time in both the Senate and Assembly, Smith publicly stated that he is a strong advocate for green energy initiatives, emphasizing the

importance of energy-efficient home upgrades to reduce utility bills and to promote environmental sustainability.

Smith graduated from Eau Claire North High School in 1973. After high school, he took over his father's window-cleaning business. He successfully ran this business from 1973 until 2011, growing it from a small father-son operation to one with 22 employees.

During his time as a business owner, Smith was also involved in local government. He served on the Brunswick Town Board. He also founded the Parent Advisory Committee for the Eau Claire School District and served on the Governor's Task Force on Educational Excellence.

Smith lives in the Town of Brunswick with his wife, Sue, a retired elementary school teacher. The Smiths have been married for more than 40 years and have two adult children. They enjoy spending time on their farm, caring for their animals and land.

Assembly Energy and Utilities Committee Vice Chair Summerfield



Rob Summerfield (R-Bloomer) is serving his fifth term in the State Assembly. He

represents the 68th Assembly District, which is in the northwestern part of the state. It includes all of Price and Rusk counties, as well as most of Chippewa and Taylor counties. Summerfield was first elected in 2017 to the 67th

District, but the 2024 redistricting shifted most his constituency to the 68th District.

He was recently elected as the Majority Caucus Chair by his Republican peers. He is the Vice-Chair of the Assembly Energy and Utilities Committee. He also serves as a member of other committees including Assembly Organization, Housing and Real Estate, Rules, State Affairs, Tourism, Veterans and Military Affairs, and Health, and Aging and Long-Term Care.

Summerfield supports a balanced approach to energy policy that includes both traditional energy sources and renewable energy initiatives. He has also shown support for measures that enhance energy infrastructure and safety, and he advocates for policies that encourage innovation and investment in clean energy technologies to ensure a sustainable energy future for Wisconsin.

Summerfield is a life-long resident of Bloomer. He graduated from Bloomer High School in 1998 and went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Stout in 2002.

He has a background in the restaurant industry, having helped run his family business, the Two Acres Supper Club. He also co-owned the Chippewa Valley Land Title Company. He has said that his background as a small business owner provided him with a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by local businesses.

He continues to be active in his community, participating in the Bloomer Chamber of Commerce and coaching youth sports.

Summerfield lives in Bloomer with his wife, Kim, and their three daughters.

Rep. DeSanto is new to the 40th District



Representing the 40th District, Karen DeSanto (D-Baraboo) joined the Wisconsin

State Assembly in January 2025. The 40th Assembly District is the central part of the state, including parts of Columbia and Sauk counties and the villages of Pardeeville and Prairie du Sac, as well as Sauk City, among others.

She is serving on the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

For the last 30 years, DeSanto has worked, lived, and raised a family in Baraboo. Prior to running for office, she served as the chief executive officer of the Boys & Girls Clubs of West Central Wisconsin from 2011 to 2024, during which she significantly expanded the organization and its impact.

She also served as the first female President of the State Alliance of Wisconsin Clubs, securing \$26 million in state and federal support for kids and families during her term in 2020-2022. Her leadership was particularly important as she guided

Continued on page 11

Political Profiles *Continued from page 10*

the clubs through the challenges of the pandemic, ensuring they were able to continue to provide essential services to their communities.

DeSanto was born in Sacramento, Calif. She graduated from Luther Burbank High School and then began a career as a professional clown, specializing in children's birthday parties.

In the early 1990s, DeSanto attended a clown camp in Wisconsin and later graduated from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Baraboo in 1993. She per-

formed with her former husband, Greg DeSanto, as a professional circus clown for nearly 20 years. They performed at venues including the Big Apple Circus and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. DeSanto was also a member of the Clown Care hospital clowning program, bringing joy to children in hospitals, before transitioning to a career with the Boys and Girls Clubs of West Central Wisconsin.

DeSanto currently resides in Baraboo with her high-school-aged daughter. ●

APPA urges members to contact lawmakers about impact of federal funding freeze

To better understand the impact of federal funding freezes on its members, the American Public Power Association (APPA) is asking member utilities to let the association know if a federal funding award has been "frozen" or delayed. In addition, APPA is seeking details on the award stage a member is in (i.e., a grant has been announced, a grant agreement and/or contract has been signed, a member is awaiting reimbursement, etc.), and the program under which a grant has been received (i.e., the DOE GRIP Program). Please provide these details to APPA's David Hadley at dhadley@publicpower.org. In addition, APPA members who may have been affected by these freezes are strongly encouraged to tell their congressional delegations about the impact the freeze is having or will have on their communities, customers, and their utility operations.

Wisconsin **UTILITY NEWS** *Digest*

Residential customer-satisfaction among Wisconsin IOUs remains mixed in recent national survey

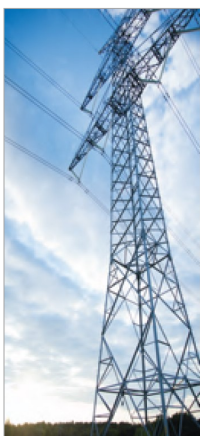
Wisconsin's investor-owned utilities (IOUs) received mixed customer-satisfaction ratings in 2024 surveys of residential electric customers conducted by J.D. Power and Associates. Alliant Energy (709 on a 1,000-point scale) and We Energies (698) both rated below the aver-

age (716) of large Midwest-based utilities. Xcel Energy (723) rated above the average of that same group, in which MidAmerican Energy, based in Iowa, ranked highest for the third consecutive year (755).

Among the 16 medium-sized Midwest utilities in the survey, Madison Gas and Electric ranked second with a score of 729 and Wisconsin Public Service Corp.

was third (728), compared to the group's average of 692.

J.D. Power surveyed more than 100,000 residential customers nationwide in the first 11 months of 2024. Overall satisfaction with electric utilities declined for a fourth consecutive year — from 748 in 2021 to a new low of 707 in 2024. The areas most affected by the decline were billing and payment and customer care.



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Industry veteran confirmed as U.S. Energy Secretary



Chris Wright, a self-described energy nerd turned entrepreneur, was confirmed as the 17th Secretary for the U.S. Department of Energy in February.

A native of Colorado, Wright was appointed by President Donald Trump late last year. He most recently served as Chairman and CEO of Liberty Energy, a hydraulic fracturing company. Earlier in his career, he founded Pinnacle Technologies, a company that contributed to the launch of commercial shale gas production in the late 1990s. He completed an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and graduate work in Electrical Engineering at Univ. of California-Berkeley and MIT.

May 6 forum to explore impact of data centers

The Customers First Coalition (CFC) will host its annual Power Breakfast on Tuesday, May 6, in Madison. The forum will focus on projected increases in electricity demand from the expansion of data centers and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) applications happening nationwide.

Regulators, legislators, industry experts and executives will provide insights about this growing demand trend driven by technology innovation. Summer Strand, Chairperson of the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, will kick off the morning program that will explore the biggest energy challenges presented by data centers and how utilities are addressing them. The event will be held at the Premier Park Hotel in downtown Madison. Learn more [here](#).



MEUW is a founding member of CFC, which was originally formed more than 25 years ago, and has helped to shape energy policy that promotes consensus among Wisconsin's energy stakeholders and produces sensible solutions to today's energy challenges. MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich currently serves at Vice Chair of the CFC Board of Directors.

CFC Executive Director Kristin Gilkes is the producer and host of *The Electric Wire* podcast that addresses hot topics affecting utility regulation and aims to help educate policymakers about the impact to customers. Past episodes of the podcast have explored the electric-utility operating models, including one that focused on the unique advantages of public power. To access an archive of the podcast or learn more about CFC, visit customersfirst.org. ●

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Multifamily properties = Opportunity for smart energy solutions

Approximately 32% of Wisconsin residents are renters, with an estimated 20,000 multifamily buildings in Wisconsin, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, including various types of multifamily housing, such as apartment complexes, duplexes, and other residential buildings with multiple units. This significant portion of the population underscores the importance of energy efficiency in multifamily properties, especially as these properties continue to age. In partnership with Focus on Energy and local utilities, both renters and landlords can play a part in improving energy efficiency in multifamily buildings, which not only reduces utility bills but also enhances the comfort of living spaces.

Energy-saving ideas for renters

While [renters](#) typically have fewer options with making physical changes to their homes to save energy, there are still many ways to save. To lower energy bills, save energy, and reduce environmental impacts, Focus on Energy has tips for renters. Even small behaviors can make an impact – saving up to 20% when added up. Here are some practical [steps](#) renters can take:

Thermostat Management: Using a [programmable thermostat](#) can help renters maintain optimal temperatures while saving energy in their homes. Setting the thermostat to a lower temperature in winter and a higher temperature in summer when not at home can lead to substantial savings. During summer months, use a ceiling fan to circulate air. Some fans can be switched to turn in the opposite direction to help you feel warmer in the winter.

Electronics: Many electronics consume energy even when they are switched off but still plugged in. Renters are encouraged to unplug batteries and power adapters when not in use, including laptop and cell phone chargers. To eliminate standby power consumption, renters can use [advanced power strips](#) to simultaneously turn off all equipment in an area when not in use.

Lighting: Turning off lights that are not in use is one of the easiest ways that renters can save energy. As light bulbs burn out, renters can replace them with energy-efficient [LED bulbs](#), which use less energy and last a lot longer than standard light bulbs.

Energy-saving ideas for landlords

Landlords have a significant impact on the overall energy efficiency of multifamily properties. Focus provides resources and incentives to help multifamily [property owners](#) reduce energy costs, while improving building comfort. Energy-efficient building improvements are a smart move for property owners as they often lead to greater tenant satisfaction

and lower turnover rates, fewer maintenance issues and associated costs, and lower operating and energy costs. Focus on Energy offers incentives for both in-unit and common area upgrades for multifamily properties with four or more units under one roof. Conducting regular energy audits can help identify areas where energy efficiency improvements are needed. These audits provide valuable insights into energy consumption patterns and potential savings.



Here are some strategies property owners can implement:

Energy-Efficient Appliances: Landlords can opt for energy-efficient appliances, such as refrigerators, microwaves, and air conditioners. The easiest way to find energy-efficient models is to look for the ENERGY STAR® label, which indicates the appliance meets energy efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Efficient Common Area Lighting: Using motion sensors and timers for lighting in common areas can prevent lights from being left on unnecessarily. Upgrading to LED lighting in these areas can also contribute to energy savings. According to energy.gov, LEDs use at least 75% less energy and last 25 times longer than incandescent lighting. There are countless opportunities to make the switch to LEDs, including lobby lighting, parking garage lighting, and exit sign lighting.

Insulation and Air Sealing: Proper insulation in walls, attics, and basements can prevent heat loss in winter and keep the property cool in summer. Sealing gaps and cracks around windows, doors, and pipes can further enhance energy efficiency.

HVAC Systems: Upgrading to high-efficiency heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems can significantly reduce energy consumption. Regular maintenance, such as cleaning filters and ducts, ensures these systems operate efficiently.

Educating landlords and tenants about energy-saving practices can lead to more conscious energy use. Focus on Energy offers many [resources](#) municipal utilities can share with their multifamily customers. Providing information encouraging energy-saving behaviors can make a significant difference. The benefits of energy efficiency extend beyond financial savings, promoting environmental responsibility and enhancing the quality of life for all Wisconsin multifamily residents. ●

Members' NEWS

Vanguard Utilities, which services municipal utility customers in Black Earth and Mazomanie, welcomed **Mason Kaufman** as Apprentice Lineman on Feb. 24.



Sheboygan Falls City Administrator/Utility Manager **Shad Tenpas** has announced he is leaving the role after nearly 10 years. His last day on the job is April 18.

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.

Engage with MEUW on Bluesky Social

Early last year, a new platform opened in the social-media space promising a “decentralized” approach by operating on a system that is not controlled by any one person or organization. Bluesky is the next iteration of online social engagement and has quickly grown to more than 25 million users, especially among journalists, researchers and academics. MEUW recently established an account in the Bluesky app at [@munielecwis.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/@munielecwis.bsky.social) — follow along.



Spring Forward!

Daylight Saving Time begins on Sunday, March 9, at 2 a.m. Remember to set your clocks ahead one hour.



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LIVELines Classifieds

MEUW is pleased to promote job openings with its member utilities across Wisconsin. New positions are regularly added to our website — check them out [here](#) or use your smartphone to scan the QR code below. Here are some current opportunities available:

Village of Pardeeville

- [Journeyman Line Worker](#)
- [Public Works Operator](#)
- [Public Works Foreman](#)

City of Fennimore

- [Public Works Maintenance Worker](#)
- [Journey Lineworker](#)

City of Kiel — [Electric Line Foreman](#)

Sun Prairie Utilities

- [Substation Technician](#)
- [General Manager](#)

City of River Falls

- [Apprentice Journeyman Lineworker](#)
- [Journeyman Lineworker](#)

Kaukauna Utilities

- [Billing Specialist](#)
- [Junior Mechanical Technician](#)
- [Mechanical Technician](#)

Plymouth Utilities

- [Line Clearance Tree Trimmer \(Limited Term\)](#)
- [Journeyman Lineman](#)

When your utility is hiring, be sure to email the job posting to office@meuw.org.



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