

LIVELines

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MEUW “Day at the Capitol” is 2/5/25

From its inception, MEUW has been focused on presenting a “common voice” and advocating for Wisconsin’s municipal electric utilities. The state legislature is expected to reconvene at the Capitol in Madison mid-January—including many new and redistricted members—and will continue debate for several weeks. This is a great opportunity for MEUW and its members to visit with lawmakers to educate and inform them of the vital role played by public power utilities in our state.

To maximize this opportunity, MEUW is planning a “Day at the Capitol” on Wednesday, Feb. 5 (or 2/5/25 as an easy-to-remember date). All members are encouraged to join together in Madison to let our legislators know what’s important to municipal electric utilities. There is no cost to participate, and MEUW will coordinate the meetings.

This event is being organized to exclusively share the public

power story and to discuss matters of importance to municipal electric utilities. The Best Western Premier Park Hotel (formerly known as Inn



on the Park) will once again serve as our staging site for MEUW’s Day at the Capitol, which will begin at 8:30 a.m. After a brief informational session to review the issues and talking points, small groups will make their way across the street to the Capitol to visit Senate and Assembly offices for pre-arranged meetings with legislators and their staffs. The event wraps up with a group lunch and discussion back at the hotel.

While all municipal electric utility staff are welcome to attend, the visits will be especially valuable for mayors, city council members, utility commissioners and others

who have an interest in advocating for public power. Those who govern, lead, and work in municipal utilities are in the best position to talk to lawmakers about the impact their actions have at the local level. MEUW will arrange the meetings so registrants have a chance to meet with their own legislator and maximize the connections.

Don’t miss this great opportunity to network with others in Wisconsin’s public power community and help educate our legislative leaders about issues that matter to the industry and to our communities. Learn more and register at [MEUW.org](https://www.meuw.org). The registration deadline is Jan. 31. ●

Start your year at EOCE25 in the Dells

There are still a few days left to register for the 2025 Electric Operations Conference & Expo, which will be held Jan. 15–17 at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. This annual conference attracts municipal and cooperative utility leaders and employees from throughout Wisconsin. More than 250 people have already registered to attend the event.

The event will kick off at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 15, with general sessions for all registered attendees. A Welcome Reception will take place from 5:00–7:00 p.m.

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Thursday's session will include an exploration of cyber and physical security measures around grid and infrastructure security, an update on the recently formed Damage Prevention Council of Wisconsin working to address the challenges of utility locates, and a review of utilities' responsibility around contractor safety. Attendees can select from three timely and topical breakout sessions — each of which will be offered twice — to allow participants the chance to choose more than one. The day will also feature several cohort discussions for attendees to choose from, talking with others who have similar needs and interests.

Thursday's trade show will feature 100+ vendors showcasing the latest products and services. A full listing of confirmed exhibitors is available [here](#).

Participants can also check out the trade show, where more than 100 utility suppliers will showcase their products and services, and be available to discuss the latest options. Select vendors will

provide brief product demonstrations throughout the day on the new "Supplier Showcase" stage in the Exhibition Hall.

Thursday's program concludes with a keynote presentation featuring a "fireside chat" with Green Bay Packers Hall of Famer Gilbert Brown, who will discuss the importance of teamwork, overcoming adversity, and community service. He will be available following the meeting to sign one autograph per person — bring your favorite Packer memorabilia or purchase one there (cash please) for Gilbert to sign.

On Thursday evening, more than 30 individuals who completed the requirements to become journeymen lineworkers will be honored at the annual graduation banquet.

EOCE25 is presented by EPS, the event's Diamond Level sponsor. Other major sponsors are HDR, Miron Construction, and Wesco Anixter. Full details and registration info are available at meuw.org/eoce. ●



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Members' *NEWS*



Mark Skubal, Menasha Utilities' Senior Lineman, is retiring after 22 years with the utility. Mark served in the U.S. Army as a combat engineer prior to becoming a lineman. He began his utility career with the electric cooperative in Georgetown, Tenn., and after nine years moved to the Menasha area.

Brenda Fenske has joined Sun Prairie Utilities as Billing Coordinator.

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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Reflecting on 2024 successes and a bright future for MEUW

By Nick Kumm, MEUW Board Chair

With the calendar now flipped to 2025, it's a great time to reflect on the busy and successful year MEUW had in 2024 and look ahead with optimism to the future. This year has been a testament to the dedication, hard work, and shared vision of the entire MEUW community. As the MEUW Board Chair since May, I continue to be impressed by everything our members and the association have accomplished together.

At the heart of MEUW's success is a strong foundation built on common values and mutual interests. I'd like to extend my deepest appreciation to my fellow Executive Committee members, the Board of Directors, and all the committee members who generously volunteer their time and talents. A special thanks goes to Tim Heinrich and the entire MEUW team for their exceptional communication and the invaluable services they provided during the year.

This year, MEUW has continued to deliver essential services and fostered growth within the industry. From the Electric Operations Conference & Expo in January to various workshops on line design and solar energy, MEUW has remained at the forefront of advancing knowledge and professional development. Our professional development, safety training, and roundtable events have provided members with tools and connections they need to succeed.

Here are just a few of the notable successes from 2024:

Legislative Wins: Three bills championed by MEUW were signed into law, marking significant legislative victories for municipal utilities. Through collaboration with the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association and others, a bill that

allows utility vehicles to display green warning lights when restoring power was passed. This new law will enhance safety for workers and drivers alike. Two Senate bills cleared the path for the development of a network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across Wisconsin's highways and interstates. These new laws will allow Wisconsin to access nearly \$80 million in federal funding to help private businesses establish high-speed Level 3 charging stations. Additionally, these laws open doors for partnerships with businesses along highways to facilitate the installation of these essential charging stations.

Mutual Aid Events: MEUW coordinated mutual aid efforts in Wisconsin and Florida following severe storms. These events brought out the best in municipal utilities, showcasing their collaborative spirit and readiness to support one another during times of crisis.

Safety Initiatives: In 2024, two new safety-related offerings were introduced: monthly safety calls and emailed safety reminders. These initiatives aim to keep safety at the forefront of our work and ensure that all employees have access to the latest information and best practices in the industry.

Professional Development: Thirty-seven employees from member utilities completed one or both of MEUW's new professional development leadership series. This series provides valuable skills to foster leadership and growth within the utility sector.

After a memorable 95th anniversary celebration and a successful lobby day in 2023, MEUW continues to build momentum as it approaches its 100th year. During a recent strategic planning session, I had the privilege of observing the great teamwork and alignment across utilities of all sizes. As we define strategic

priorities for the future, it's clear that MEUW is poised to continue providing valuable resources and advocacy for municipal utilities in Wisconsin.

I'm deeply encouraged and proud to serve as Board Chair for such a forward-thinking and impactful organization. The teamwork and commitment from all involved are driving MEUW toward an even more prosperous future.

As we look ahead to the coming year, I'm confident that MEUW's direction will continue to benefit our members, helping them navigate the challenges of the utility industry and supporting the broader goal of delivering reliable, efficient, and innovative services to the communities we serve.

Here's to a successful 2024 and an even brighter future as we approach MEUW's centennial. Together, we will continue to build a legacy of excellence.

Nick Kumm is General Manager of Marshfield Utilities and Managing Director of Great Lakes Utilities. He currently serves as Chair of the MEUW Board of Directors.



Later this month, the MEUW Board of Directors is expected to endorse a refresh of the association's **long-term**

strategic plan

that follows visioning work completed in 2024. The updated plan will include a new vision statement that reflects the next phase in

MEUW's history. Watch for full details in the February edition of *LIVE LINES*.



Resolve to focus on professional development in 2025

Setting goals at the beginning of a new year is a time-honored tradition, and individuals today are just as interested in finding motivation and making a fresh start as those who made the first “New Year’s Resolutions” in ancient times. Whether or not you’ve already set goals for 2025, MEUW is offering training that will help you and your colleagues refresh your perspective, gain new skills, and advance your professional development in the year ahead.

Discover how “The Power of One” can influence customer service

Customer interactions happen in every role, whether it’s a formal part of your job, or a chance encounter in the grocery store. From Customer Service Representatives to engineers, office managers to lineworkers, effective customer service skills are essential.

To help build customer interaction and communication skills, MEUW is pleased to be offering a new online series called “The Power of One.” Divided into six 90-minute modules, the series will fea-

ture live virtual sessions focused on different aspects of and skills needed for effective customer service.

Individuals can sign up for a few classes, or complete the series and earn a certificate of completion. You can also gather a small group at your location to participate together (smaller groups of four to six will work better due to the interactive nature of the classes.) No travel is required, and the 90-minute timeframe minimizes the time away. Volume pricing or a “try-then-buy” option are available. Full details and registration options are available [here](#).

Stay ahead of the rules and learn the fundamentals of a well-run utility

The “right to serve” electric customers is a privilege municipal utilities can’t take for granted. Understanding the complexities of utility regulation and the variety of rules required to comply with state and federal safety and employment laws is essential to effectively managing a utility every day. As part of MEUW’s “Fundamentals of Utility

Management” training program, this one-day course explores the rules and regulations, the reasons many of those rules exist, and the risks and consequences when utilities fail to follow them. Participants will take away a deeper understanding of these important concepts and gain new insights to make compliance more efficient. The class will be held in Mauston on Feb. 12. An outline of the training topics, the instructors, and registration details are listed [here](#).

Strengthen your leadership skills and learn about effective coaching

High-performing leaders develop the skill and emotional intelligence to coach others effectively. Knowing how and when to coach is an essential leadership quality, and good coaches recognize how self-awareness helps them to be more effective as a leader and serve as a role model for others. MEUW’s three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate Program includes a course focused on coaching as a leadership skill. The class will be held April 2; full details [here](#). ●



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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

Eleven earn Municipal Leadership Certificate

Municipal employees representing eight MEUW member utilities recently took the next step in their professional development journeys by completing MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate Program.

The series focuses on a set of core leadership competencies — including coaching, collaboration, and consistency — essential to success as a leader in a municipal utility setting. Training is designed for new, emerging, and seasoned leaders; managers; and supervisors. Municipal workers of all skill levels and backgrounds can benefit from the series. Participants will take away new skills and ideas that can be put into immediate use. The training is designed to facilitate networking and foster peer learning and support. To learn more about professional development opportunities, visit meuw.org/pdp. •



Eleven municipal workers received certificates on Dec. 4 after completing MEUW's Municipal Leadership Certificate Program. Those honored include (from left): **Dustin Gruling**, Lead Lineman, **Jason Otto**, Lead Lineman, and **Lucas Caine**, Senior Engineer, all of Oconomowoc Utilities; **Jordan Peichel**, Utility Manager for Cumberland Municipal Utilities; **Katrien Rogers**, Customer Service Supervisor with Manitowoc Public Utilities; **Jason Sisel**, Journeyman Lineman with Two Rivers Utilities; **Nate Jicinsky**, Journeyman Lineman, and **Jason Kluess**, Senior Lineman, both with Menasha Utilities; **Michael Avanzi**, General Manager of Kaukauna Utilities; **Ryan Pelowski**, Lead Lineworker at Trempealeau Municipal Utilities; and **Isaac Pooler**, Administrator/Finance Director for the Village of Trempealeau.

Did you know? MEUW has negotiated discounts with two companies for safety equipment and products used by member utilities. To take advantage of exclusive MEUW pricing, follow these steps:

Conney Safety Products — Email sales@conney.com

The account name is under MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC UTILITIES, account #100343434. Make sure to use your credit card to purchase.

Verona Safety — Email samie@veronasafety.com

Or contact Samie Gossfeld by phone at (608) 204-5955. Let him know you're a member of MEUW and which utility you're from to receive the discount.

Stoughton: Focused on service to customers and community

MEUW Community Spotlight

What do Norway, semi-trailers, coffee breaks, and green energy have in common?

Probably not a lot ... but they all hold a solid place in the history of Stoughton, Wisconsin.

Just 20 minutes southeast of Madison in Dane County, Stoughton is a vibrant, historic community with a population of about 13,000. The city owns and operates Stoughton Utilities, which provides electric, water, and wastewater services. The electric utility serves approximately 9,200 customers in Stoughton and throughout its expansive 50-square mile territory that extends into Rock County.

The City of Stoughton employs a team of 24 to operate all three utilities, including seven specifically dedicated to electric linework. Utilities Director Jill Weiss says the utility enjoys a good relationship with its customers, and the employees take extraordinary pride in serving Stoughton and other communities in need.

Stoughton was one of 22 Wisconsin municipal communities to answer the call to help restore power in Florida last October in the aftermath of Hurricane Milton.

Weiss is a certified professional engineer who joined Stoughton Utilities in 2019, bringing with her experiences working for municipals and a large investor-owned utility. She's the first woman to lead Stoughton Utilities and one of only two females leading public power utilities in Wisconsin. Having worked in the predominantly-male utility industry for her whole career, Weiss says she hardly notices those distinctions. "It's all I know, and I always feel welcomed and valued on the job," she said.

She sees the benefits of municipal utilities being directly accountable to the people in their communities.

"All utilities — whether they are municipal or investor-owned — have an interest in serving their customers to the best of their abilities," Weiss said. "But employees of municipal utilities such as ours bring a whole different level of ownership and pride to what they do." And Weiss finds that is a great way to

work. "The best part of Stoughton is its people," she said. "And I have the privilege of working with great people every day."

History of Stoughton

Stoughton was founded in 1847 by Luke Stoughton, an English immigrant from Vermont, who named the town after himself.

Many Norwegian immigrants settled in the area during the 19th century, as Stoughton is situated on fertile ground surrounding the Yahara River, which made it attractive farmland. Tobacco was a particularly important crop.

The Village of Stoughton was incorporated in 1862 and became a city in 1882. Late in the 19th century, the community experienced rapid industrial growth with the establishment of various mills and factories, including the Stoughton Wagon Company. The city began operating its own electrical utility system to better meet the needs of all residents in 1891.

Fast forward, Stoughton has come a long way from tobacco and wagons, but it still celebrates its Norwegian heritage and traditions and maintains a beautiful historic downtown. Today it is home to a diverse range of businesses, and it attracts thousands of tourists every year.

Utility Operations

Stoughton Utilities is governed by the seven-person Utilities Committee, which includes both citizens and council alderpersons. The electric utility is a member of WPPI Energy and offers energy efficiency programs, incentive rebates, and on-line customer tools. "We offer a variety of programs to serve a diverse range of customers," Weiss said.

One of the oldest and most well-known companies in town is semi-trailer manufacturer Stoughton Trailers. The company, which has been in business for more than 60 years, broke ground on a new headquarters in the far northwest corner of Stoughton last spring. The energy-efficient building is expected to be completed this fall.

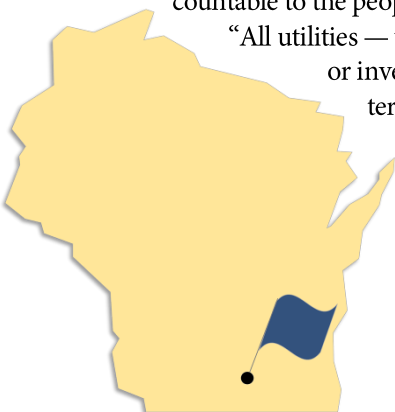
Emmi Roth, an industry-leading cheesemaker, constructed its new North American headquarters in Stoughton in 2023. The 158,000-square-foot building and operation, which includes



Along Main Street in Stoughton is the iconic clock tower on a historic landmark building, built in 1900, that houses City Hall and the Stoughton Opera House.



Weiss



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both office space as well as a state-of-the-art conversion facility, brought about 125 new employees to Stoughton.

Uniroyal Engineered Products manufactures Naugahyde, a predominant brand in the vinyl-coated fabrics industry, in Stoughton. B&G Foods also has a plant in town that produces packaged foods such as Ortega Salsa and Taco Sauce and Cream of Wheat.

Other large customers include Zalk Joseph Fabricators, which specializes in providing fabricated steel products and services for the construction industry, and Colorcon, a company that designs and produces advanced coating systems for the pharmaceutical industry.

While Stoughton Utilities delivers reliability and support to keep business alive and vibrant in Stoughton, the utility is also focusing efforts on rural and agricultural customers. In fact, Weiss said Stoughton Utilities is currently working on several projects aimed at increasing reliability and improving service in more remote areas of its service territory.

“We are working on a large rural rebuild,” Weiss said. “We are also in process of looping our only radial-fed circuit, which is difficult because of our lakes and geography.” Weiss expects both efforts will take several years to complete.

An Award-Winning Utility

For the last nine years, Stoughton Utilities has ranked among the top 10 utilities nationwide by the U.S.

Department of Energy’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory for the utility’s Green Power Participation Rate and Green Power Sales Rate.

According to Brandi Yungen, Education and Outreach Coordinator for Stoughton Utilities, these accolades reflect the community’s strong commitment to renewable energy. Yungen said the City Council recently approved the Sustainability Committee’s Sustainability Plan, which lays out initiatives to ensure a greener future for Stoughton residents. “Our community’s commitment to sustainability shows by the success of programs such as our Choose Renewable program,” Yungen said.

Last year, about four percent of Stoughton Utilities’ customers voluntarily participated in the Choose Renewable program, which allows customers to support clean energy by purchasing renewable energy blocks.

“The people of Stoughton continue to receive national attention when it comes to renewable energy,” said Weiss. “Stoughton Utilities, the City of Stoughton, and many smaller businesses and residential customers have chosen to participate. We hope



Helping to keep the lights on in Stoughton are (front, left to right): Michael Nawrocki, Andrew Ruder, Ryan Jefferson, Chad Mason, Paul Schmeling, Collin Cadotte, and Joe Adler (on the truck).

the program grows even bigger in the future.”

Stoughton Utilities was also one of only 20 public power utilities in the country to be recognized by the American Public Power Association (APPA) with a Public Power Customer Satisfaction Award for providing excellent service to its community. The winners were determined through customer feedback surveys, which measured satisfaction in areas including customer service, communication, value, reliability, and outage response.

“We proudly serve the people of Stoughton,” said Weiss. “To be recognized for our dedication to customer service excellence is truly gratifying for our team, which works so hard every day.”

Focused on the Community

Stoughton Utilities also has various community support programs, such as the RoundUP Program, which allows customers to round up their utility bills to the nearest dollar, with the extra funds supporting local non-profit organizations. The Stoughton Utility Committee decides where to direct funds each year.

“The program is still relatively small — with less than 500 participants — but we are able to support several very deserving non-profits organizations in Stoughton each year, which can make a big impact to a small city like ours,” Yungen said.

Additionally, Stoughton Utilities’ holiday light exchange has evolved over the years to become a way for the community to give back to the City of Stoughton’s Food Pantry during the holiday season, Yungen said. In the past, customers brought in their old incandescent lights and exchanged them for new, more energy efficient LED lights. “But people no longer have the old lights to trade in,” Yungen said. “Now if customers simply donate five non-perishable food items, they receive a string of new LED holiday lights. It’s a win-win for our community.”

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Wisconsin UTILITY NEWS Digest

Regulators approve largest solar project in state history

The Public Service Commission (PSC) of Wisconsin has approved construction of a \$2 billion solar power project that could have more than 1,300 MW of generation capacity. The [Vista Sands Solar Project](#), sited on more than 6,000 acres in Portage County, was green-lighted by a unanimous vote of the PSC on Dec. 12.

Vista Sands would be more than four times the size of the state's largest current solar array, the 300-megawatt Badger Hollow Solar Park in the south-western part of the state. The first phase of that solar farm entered commercial operation in late 2021. Vista Sands also is expected to have 300 MW of battery energy storage.

The project, located near the towns of Plover and Grant in central Wisconsin, is being developed by Vista Sands Solar LLC, a subsidiary of Philadelphia, Penn.-based Doral Renewables. Con-



struction is expected to begin in 2026, with commercial operation expected in 2028 or 2029. Doral officials said they've had discussions with utilities that could buy power from the solar farm. Portage County is part of Wisconsin Public Service Corp.'s service territory; Wisconsin Power & Light (Alliant Energy) and some electric co-operatives also have customers in the region, according to the PSC.

Wisconsin Public Radio reported that Vista Sands also would bring more than \$6 million in annual utility aid payments to Portage County and other areas around the project. It is an agrivoltaic development, with Doral leasing the land from the owners, who are mostly farmers.

PSC Chair Summer Strand told Wisconsin Public Radio that, "This would be by far the largest solar project in the state of Wisconsin and one of the largest in the upper Midwest. This is one of the most beneficial and impactful renewable energy projects ever proposed in Wisconsin."

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A Destination to Visit

Stoughton's biggest event of the year is the Syttende Mai Festival, a vibrant celebration of Norwegian heritage. The weekend festival takes place every year around Norway's Constitution Day. This year's activities, which will include a parade, music, cultural demonstrations, and an arts and crafts fair, will begin on May 16, 2025.

On the third weekend in August, Stoughton has another big celebration — the Coffee Break Festival. Stoughton is often credited as the birthplace of the coffee break. The tradition is said to have started in the early 20th century when Nor-

wegian immigrants working in the town's tobacco warehouses would take regular breaks for coffee.

Another popular attraction is the spectacular Stoughton Opera House. The venue opened in 1901 but closed in the mid-20th century after falling into disrepair. It was restored and reopened in 2001, and now hosts more than 30,000 people annually for a variety of shows.

"Stoughton is such a friendly, close-knit community," Weiss said. "Many of our customers are also our friends and neighbors. There is much to see and do here ... it's a great place to be." ●

Vote Solar appeal dismissed; request for declaratory ruling on third-party-financing ends

On Jan. 3, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals granted a motion by the Wisconsin Utilities Association (WUA) to dismiss Vote Solar's appeal of an April 2024 ruling in which a Circuit Court said the PSC incorrectly interpreted what constitutes a "public utility." The appellate court's action officially concludes a regulatory proceeding that dates back to May 2022 when the San Francisco, Calif.-based nonprofit advocacy group asked the PSC to issue a declaratory ruling about whether third-party financiers of solar installations should be regulated under Wisconsin law.

In September 2024, the PSC declined to issue such a ruling. WUA was joined by other utility stakeholders, including MEUW, in petitioning for judicial review of the matter, which was ultimately dismissed on the basis of "mootness."

DOE announces grid R&D funding opportunities

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) recently released three Notices of Funding Opportunity, totaling nearly \$18.4 million, for programs to support research and development of electric grid technologies.

DOE said the programs will reduce the cost of high-voltage direct current circuit breakers, improve risk assessment and communication for grid operators, and ensure communities are ready to respond to unanticipated energy storage system failures. The three funding opportunities each have different application deadlines and specific funding criteria.

Full details are available on the [Fed-Connect](#) system that helps vendors and grant applicants, find, respond to and win assistance funding.

Wait and see after Dane County Judge's decision on Act 10

By Attorney Brian P. Goodman

Act 10 (later amended by 2015 Act 55) was enacted and signed into law by Gov. Scott Walker in 2010. These laws severely limited collective bargaining for municipal bargaining units other than public safety employees (police and fire). Since that time, municipal bargaining for public employees other than police and fire personnel has somewhat disappeared, including for employees of municipal utilities.

On Dec. 2, 2024, a Dane County judge struck down portions of Act 10 and Act 55 for violating the equal protection guarantees in the Wisconsin Constitution. While Acts 10 and 55 limited the collective bargaining rights of most public employees, the collective bargaining rights of “general” employees were restricted more significantly than “public safety” employees. In July 2024, the same judge ruled there was no rational basis for classifying certain groups of employees as “general” employees rather than “public safety” employees.

This more recent decision is not easy to analyze. The most substantive part of the decision merely lists numerous provisions of Acts 10 and 55 that are struck down in their entirety, with no additional explanation. Reconciling all those struck sections and reverting the law back, in part, to its pre-Act 10 status is complicated. After initial review, public sector labor attorneys are finding inconsistencies and potentially unintended consequences from the decision striking down some provisions but not others.

So what does this all mean? For now, municipal utilities should wait and see if there are further legal developments regarding this decision. An appeal has already been filed. In addition, having already joined the suit early on to defend Acts 10 and 55, the state legislature has

now requested that the judge grant a stay of his decision pending that appeal. If granted, a stay would maintain the status quo of limited public collective bargaining until the Wisconsin Court of Appeals and/or the Wisconsin Supreme Court issues a final decision. That could take several months, or possibly more than a year.

While the decision continues to grab headlines, it raises more questions than it answers, such as:

- Is the decision retroactive to passage of Act 10? How would that even work given the changed circumstances over all these years? Would municipalities have to bargain contracts all the way back to their last post-Act 10 contract?
- How does the decision impact bargaining agreements that were already ratified by all the parties post-Act 10?
- 2011 Wisconsin Act 32 also modified collective bargaining rights for public employees, but the recent decision does not even discuss this law.
- Does the decision apply to any union or municipality that isn't a party to this case?
- Do the unions have the staff to broadly reorganize and bargain?
- The decision struck down the language in the laws regarding union dues deductions. Additionally, since the passage of Act 10, a U.S. Supreme Court case (*Janus*) has dramatically limited public sector unions from collecting dues from members of the bargaining unit who choose not to join the union. How might these decisions impact unions' ability to organize and bargain?
- The Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC) is named as a party in the case. But even if WERC wanted to comply with the decision, does it have the capacity to implement the decision? Since Act 10's passage, the WERC staffing levels have dramatically decreased.

While the implications of the decision are potentially wide-ranging, how it will play out is less certain. Moreover, since the decision has been appealed and may be stayed, in reality, at least in the short term, not much is likely to change.

The constitutionality of Act 10 already has been litigated in a variety of state and federal courts since 2010. Shortly after its passage, another Dane County judge found the law unconstitutional, but was subsequently overturned on appeal. The constitutionality of Act 10 was also upheld by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. That history suggests that there is a reasonable basis to hold off on making major changes to a municipal utility's employment practices until there is more clarity.

Additionally, many, if not most, unions failed to recertify in the years following Act 10, making it less likely that there is a significant enough union presence within the municipal utility for a union to start pushing to negotiate more broadly in light of this decision.

The bottom line is that, for now, municipal utilities should tread carefully. Municipal utilities that start bargaining more broadly with unions might face problems down the line if the decision is overturned on appeal. Such bargaining might potentially be declared unlawful retroactively, leading to potential legal claims. If former bargaining units reach out to re-engage their status, or if you are currently engaged in post-Act 10 bargaining and are asked to bargain outside the restrictions of Acts 10 and 55, you should promptly contact your labor and employment counsel to help fashion the proper response. ●

Brian P. Goodman is an attorney with Boardman Clark law firm and is experienced in guiding public and private employers through challenging legal situations.



Newcomers and veteran leaders to kick off new session



The men and women who are elected to represent the people of Wisconsin are tasked with the responsibility of considering policy proposals that can have a lasting impact on the state. Lawmakers all across the political spectrum and from throughout Wisconsin serve on legislative committees, make decisions, and vote on bills affecting municipal electric utilities and the energy industry. This month, LIVE LINES is re-introducing a regular feature to help readers get to know our elected officials to understand their influence Wisconsin politics.

Alfheim takes seat in Wisconsin Senate



Kristin Alfheim (D) was elected in November to represent the 18th District in the Wisconsin

Senate. As a result of redistricting, most of the Fox Valley shifted from the 19th Senate District to the 18th.

A lifelong Wisconsin resident, Alfheim was born and raised on a beef farm in the town of Weston, where she says she learned the value of hard work. As a teenager, she took her first job at McDonald's, and she graduated from D.C. Everest Senior High School in 1989.

Alfheim then attended Northland College in Ashland, Wis., but never graduated as she preferred working over going to classes. She returned to her job at McDonald's full-time and was eventually promoted to manager of the Wausau restaurant.

In 1999, Alfheim moved into the financial services industry and started her own agency, Appleton-based Retirement Dynamix LLC, which specializes in retirement planning and coaching and mentoring women in career advancement. In addition, she worked in volunteer government advocacy for both the Alzheimer's Association and the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors.

Alfheim joined the Appleton Common Council for the 11th District in 2021 and won re-election in 2023. During her tenure on the Common Council, Appleton Mayor Jake Woodford called Alfheim Appleton's "moderator," due to her status as the swing vote.

During her campaign, Alfheim said her top focus areas included protecting a woman's right to choose, fighting for affordable health care, and working to fully fund Wisconsin's public schools.

Alfheim has two adult children from her first marriage. She divorced after 25 years of marriage and remarried in 2022. Alfheim said she values time with her wife and blended family, which includes two stepchildren.

Sen. Bradley returns for second term, continues as Committee Chair



Sen. Julian Bradley represents the 28th District in the Wisconsin Senate. He was

first elected in 2020 and was re-elected for a second term last November. Bradley is the first Black Republican to serve in the Wisconsin Senate and only the second Black Republican to serve in the Wisconsin Legislature.

The 28th Senate District now covers part of Waukesha, Racine, and Walworth County. Bradley moved to a new residence in Franklin in 2024 after redistricting so he could continue to live in the 28th District and remain eligible for re-election.

Bradley will serve as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Utilities and Tourism for 2025. He was named to the Joint Committee on Finance, which will oversee the fiscal year 2025-2027 budget. Bradley is also Vice Chair on the Committee on Government Operation and Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Information Policy and Technology. Additionally, Bradley is a member of the Committee on Administrative Rules, the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, and the Committee on Health.

In his role on the Senate Committee on Utilities and Tourism, Bradley said he is

committed to balancing regulatory oversight with consumer interests and aims to keep utility services both safe and economically viable for Wisconsin residents. He is a strong supporter of the Right of First Refusal (ROFR) bill. He believes that this legislation is crucial for maintaining state-level control over transmission projects. The ROFR bill successfully passed the State Assembly in 2024 with a voice vote and no debate, but it is still awaiting a vote in the Senate.

Born in Baltimore, Md. Bradley moved to Wisconsin at age 11. He graduated from La Crosse Central High School, attended Temple University in Philadelphia, and earned his bachelor's in political science and economics from UW-La Crosse.

Bradley briefly pursued professional wrestling for a few years to support his family and fund his education. After college, Bradley worked in the telecommunications and insurance industries, becoming a manager at CenturyLink and later Northwestern Mutual.

Bradley is a long-time grassroots activist in the Republican Party, having been elected as a county chairman and to the Republican Party of Wisconsin executive committee. He routinely gives back to the community, including volunteering for the Salvation Army, United Way, and many literacy-based programs. He's also an avid sports fan and enjoys attending games and events with family and friends.

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Rep. Steffen begins sixth term in Assembly, will chair Energy and Utilities Committee



Rep. David Steffen (R-Howard) has served in the Wisconsin State Assembly since 2015 and was re-elected for his sixth term in 2024.

Steffen represents the 4th Assembly District, covering a mostly urban region of Green Bay. He has held several significant committee assignments during his tenure in the Wisconsin State Assembly. He has been the Vice Chair of the Energy and Utilities Committee for multiple terms and was named again as Chair for the 2025-2026 legislative session.

He also served as Chair of the Insurance Committee from 2021 to 2022, Chair of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee from 2019 to 2020, and Chair of the International Affairs and Commerce Committee in 2024. Additionally, Steffen was a member of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee for several terms.

In his role as Vice Chair of the Energy and Utilities Committee, Steffen publicly stated that he is focused on reducing costs for utility customers. He supports the Right of First Refusal (ROFR) legislation in Wisconsin. As a co-author of Assembly Bill 470, he advocates for granting incumbent utility companies the exclusive right to construct, own, and maintain new transmission lines. Steffen believes that this legislation will enhance grid reliability and help prevent out-of-state developers from taking over the state's transmission projects.

The bill was approved by the state Assembly last February and is expected to be considered by the state Senate in 2025.

Prior to taking office in 2015, Steffen spent 12 years in the education and non-profit sectors, most notably as the Director of Operations for the Legislative Leadership Institute Academy of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, he was a member of the Howard Village Board and the Brown County Board of Supervisors for eight years.

Steffen was born and raised in Ashwaubenon. After graduating Ashwaubenon High School, he attended UW-Madison and graduated with a degree in political science. Today he resides in Howard with his wife and son. ●

Focus on Energy expands accessibility, increases many rebates for 2025

Focus on Energy has made several changes for 2025 designed to make its energy-efficiency program more accessible and beneficial for utility customers. In 2025, Focus also will continue to implement the IRA Home Energy Rebates, allowing more households to make energy-saving improvements.

Residential Program Changes in '25

As a result of more cost-efficient program delivery, Focus will offer additional instant discounts for efficient [heating and cooling](#) equipment in 2025. Instant discounts on furnaces have doubled (to \$100 per unit) and discounts for heat pumps increased by about \$100, depending on the efficiency rating of the equipment.

[Multifamily](#) lighting and HVAC incentives are now bigger and aligned with the general business program incentives.

Focus's [online marketplace](#) now includes a new [smart thermostat](#) choice for customers with electric-resistant heating, from the brand Mysa. In addition, the website and installation guides associated with purchased products are now available in Spanish.

Residential customers are encouraged to begin their energy-efficiency journey by visiting the [Residential Rebate Finder](#) page.

Non-Residential Program Changes in '25

Prescriptive incentives have increased an average of 30% on select products, including LED troffers, high bay/low bay fixtures, variable frequency drives (VFDs), and HVAC. To simplify and improve rebate options for business customers, a new incentive option for watts reduced/fixture elimination and adjusting incentive structure for select LED measures is also now available.

IRA Home Energy Rebates Launched

Focus is partnering with the Public Service Commission to offer rebates through the federal government's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The Home Efficiency Rebates Program (HOMES) and the Home Electrification & Appliance Rebates (HEAR) Program are now offering discounts on the purchase of qualifying electric appliances and home upgrades for low- and moderate-income single-family residences. The program is expected to expand to include purchases made at participating retailers later in 2025. Utilities are encouraged to visit the Focus [website](#) to stay updated on all developments related to the rollout of these programs.

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MEUW NEWS Monitor

MEUW scholarship application period open now

To help ensure the education of future municipal utility workers, MEUW provides the “Powering Futures” Scholarship to students pursuing careers in electrical power distribution. Applications for this year’s awards will be accepted until Friday, Jan. 24. To be eligible, students must reside in a Wisconsin public power community and must be pursuing post-secondary education to become a Field Service Technician, Groundworker, Lineworker Apprentice, Electric Meter Technician, Substation Electrician Apprentice or Utility Technician. For more information and to review the complete criteria, visit MEUW.org/scholarships. Click [here](#) to find a customizable letter template you can send to your local high school principals and counselors to encourage applications.

Get hands-on training at Apparatus Workshop

MEUW and Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) have organized an Apparatus Workshop for Feb. 18–19. Held at CVTC’s campus in Eau Claire, this workshop will cover topics such as jobsite safety, capacitors, voltage regulators, reclosers, trip savers, meters, and connectors/connections. (Final topics may change depending on presenter availability.) Details and registration information can be found [here](#).

Share and learn at the Foreman’s Roundtable

Back by popular demand, we will once again be holding our Foreman’s Roundtable. The foreman role is important to safety and efficiency when operating a utility. The people leading utility line crews face common challenges and often don’t have an opportunity to talk with others facing those same challenges. This meeting will enable electric utility foremen to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop leadership and communication skills, especially regarding safety.

The next Foreman’s Roundtable will be held at [Milford Hills](#) in Johnson Creek. The day’s agenda will include discussion on topics most important to the participants. Following the Roundtable, attendees will have the chance to take part in an optional teambuilding and networking activity at the hunt club. Participants will be able to participate in clay trap or range shooting. A full agenda will be available soon. Registration is now [open](#).

Represent your community-owned utility at the annual APPA Legislative Rally in Washington, D.C.

The annual federal Legislative Rally to share the public power message and influence policy is set to take place Feb. 24–26, 2025. Full details about the Rally are available on the American Public Power Association (APPA) website [here](#).

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](#). Here are some current opportunities available:

Manitowoc Public Utilities

[Meter System Administrator](#)

Wisconsin Rapids Water Works & Lighting Commission

[Director of Engineering and Electric Operations](#)
[Information Systems Technician](#)

City of Stoughton

[Asset & Facilities Coordinator](#)

City of Fennimore

[Public Works Maintenance Worker](#)

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

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