

**MINUTES - MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN**

COMMISSIONERS ATTENDANCE:

Blue Earth County Kevin Paap	Mower County..... Jeff Baldus
Brown County..... Jeff Veerkamp	Murray County Dennis Welgraven
Cottonwood County... Tom Appel	Nicollet County John Luepke
Faribault County John Roper	Nobles County Gene Metz
Freeborn County Brad Edwin	Pipestone County Dan Wildermuth
Jackson County Don Wachal	Redwood County Rick Wakefield
Lincoln County Absent	Renville County Doug Erickson
Lyon County Steve Ritter	Rock County Gary Overgaard
Martin County Steve Flohrs	Watsonwan County..... Bob Rinne

OTHERS PRESENT: Jason Walker, Al Kruse, Darrick Moe, Rose Patzer, Scott Reimer, Tracey Haberman, Jim Haler, and Bruce Anderson, Molly Malone and Dallas Roskamp (alternates)

CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chair Metz called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Introductions.

AGENDA:

M/S/P Wildermuth/Luepke to approve the agenda as presented.

MINUTES:

M/S/P Wachal/Ritter to approve the minutes from January 25, 2021 as presented.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Treasurer Wildermuth presented the financial report and bills.

M/S/P Flohrs/Veerkamp to approve the Treasurer's report as presented.

M/S/P Appel/Paap to approve the payment of the bills pending totaling \$11,213 which included \$2,718 (MCIT Insurance), \$3,500 (Fryberger); \$3,375 (SRDC General); \$400 (SRDC PACE Outreach); \$720 (SRDC Finance) and \$500 (AMC for website).

Executive Committee: Nothing to report.

PACE: Don Wachal reported that there's a \$100,000 application from a Murray county business that is pending. Since the program began, PACE has closed on 31 loans. Seed and Stem in Worthington recently paid their loan in full. People are doing well with this program.

Wachal presented the results of a recent SRDC survey of PACE recipients. Eleven recipients (about 1/3) responded. Overwhelmingly, responses were positive with businesses reporting that a large majority of them noticed a difference, have saved significant amounts of money, would recommend the program to others and think that the process is relatively simple and seamless.

Legislative Committee: A lot of activity this year so far. A lot of solar bills. . . the first is a solar siting bill regarding prime farmland. Xcel is pushing this one. Another bill, SF578, is about eliminating having

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property taxes on top of production taxes (production tax would be preserved). There's another bill on small solar (less than 1 MW which do not have to pay production taxes), that would enact a tax at commercial real estate rates.

Metz reviewed a letter that Fryberger drafted to send to Senator Klobuchar regarding how transmission restraints are limiting the ability to expand wind energy in Minnesota.

M/S/P Wildermuth/Appel to send the letter to Senator Klobuchar.

MREA Presentation: Darrick Moe, President and CEO, presented on rural electric cooperatives, their history, and their role in the energy transition. The MREA position is that the transition needs to happen in a way that ensures reliability without becoming cost prohibitive. They are advocating for the passage of the ECO Act which would provide more flexibility for coops to meet their annual energy savings goals. They are also advocating for the ability to use their current easements to expand broadband where it makes commercial sense. Commissioner Wildermuth promoted this idea and asked if some of the money counties are receiving from the latest relief act could go to cooperatives to expand broadband, again, where it makes sense.

Commissioner Luepke asked about the flat monthly service rates on rural customers that put in up to 40 kW solar arrays. He stated that he often hears complaints about the high rates they are being charged. Moe explained that cooperatives have to pay the full retail price for the excess energy generated, so they need to be able to recoup that cost or else all their other customers will need to pay a higher rate for electricity.

Transmission Discussion: Staff explained how talks continue with the Great Plains Institute and the Public Utilities Commission to explore ways to stay involved in advocating for transmission expansion. Matt Prorok at GPI said that once the MTEP 21 (recommendations for transmission projects from MISO) is released, there could be an advocacy opportunity that presents itself from this plan. Commissioner Tuma with the PUC would like to arrange an in-person meeting when it's possible.

Member Updates:

- *Blue Earth* – No updates
- *Brown* – No updates
- *Cottonwood* – Plumb Creek is moving forward. Big Bend wind is also moving forward – in the hearing process. Looking at 55 towers or so. Substation sites and transmission lines identified. Late 2021 or 2022 construction. Also, will have an 846-acre solar farm
- *Faribault* – \$4 million bond for courthouse – make it more efficient as they are updating the building
- *Freeborn* – A large solar energy farm – 1,600 acres, expected to generate \$300,000 a year in production taxes.
- *Jackson* – Not much change from last report.
- *Lincoln* – No updates
- *Lyon* – No updates
- *Martin* – No updates
- *Mower* – Wind production seems to be decreasing each year

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- *Murray* – Plum Creek 400 MW project is going forward. 1 MW Solar in late April. Running into issues with who is paying for the decommissioning costs/arrangements
- *Nicollet* – Want green energy, but not solar farms
- *Nobles* – Nobles 2 is up and running, system has radar detection on them; Nobles 1 to be repowered in 2021 and 2022
- *Pipestone* – Contacted on smaller solar units by Ideal Engineering – on HHS building.
- *Redwood* – A couple solar farms N and another E end of county. Electric car plug-ins at courthouse.
- *Renville* – Issued land usage permit for 1 MW system, but it expired and now they want to put it in a different spot
- *Rock* – When Gary Overgaard was in Florida, he toured NextEra headquarters and highly recommended it to anyone if they are ever in the neighborhood.
- *Wantonwan* – Working on policies for renewable energy

Rose Patzer - Center of Energy – Extended an invitation to join the MN Energy Consortium’s meeting April 6, from 1 – 4pm when they will be presenting 10 renewable projects from rural development funds. The meeting can be joined at <https://minnstate.zoom.us/j/99219066067> Meeting ID: 992 1906 6067 Passcode: 001569.

SW CERT: Staff presented on the newly revised Home Energy Guides in both English and Spanish. They can easily be co-branded and are found at <https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org/home-energy-guide-tips>. Staff also submitted letters to the letter to a couple newspapers to promote energy assistance programs in the region. Finally, staff gave a short explanation about GreenStep Cities for the new members.

OTHER BUSINESS AND REPORTS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

NEXT MEETING – May 24 at 1pm -- will be in-person at the SRDC office unless COVID restrictions prevent that from happening. A Zoom link will be available for any persons unable to make it in-person.

FUTURE MEETINGS – July 26, September 27, November 22.

FUTURE TOPICS / GUESTS: A representative from GRE as potential speaker in the future. Scott Reimer will look into setting it up.

For a tour idea – Connexus battery storage project.

ADJOURN

Chair Metz adjourned the meeting at 3:00 PM

Minutes prepared by Jason Walker, Development Planner at SRDC

Reviewed by:
Secretary

Approved by:
Chairman