

**MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 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..... Absent
Brown County..... Jeffrey Veerkamp	Murray CountyDennis Welgraven
Cottonwood County... Tom Appel	Nicollet County Kurt Zins
Faribault County John Roper	Nobles CountyGene Metz
Freeborn County John Forman	Pipestone County Dan Wildermuth
Jackson County Don Wachal	Redwood CountyDennis Groebner
Lincoln County Mic VanDeVere	Renville CountyJohn Robinson
Lyon County Todd Draper	Rock County Gary Overgaard
Martin County Steve Flohrs	Watonwan County.....Scott Westman

OTHERS PRESENT: Nadya Bucklin (SRDC), Kim Murphy (SRDC), Jason Walker (SRDC), Chris Webb (SRDC), Dallas Roskamp (Pipestone County Commissioner – Alternate) Maggie Schuppert, Molly Malone (Murray County Commissioner – Alternate), Rich Davis (MN Department of Commerce), Anna Thill (Xcel Energy), Rose Patzer (MN State IT Center of Excellence), Cora Hoffer (Center for Rural Affairs), Jen Schulke, Luke Johnson (Solid Waste Commissioner) Ben Crowell (MN Pollution Control Agency), Sam Richie (Fryberger Law Firm), Andy Geiger (Prairieland Manager)

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Appel called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Apple announced the waste-to-energy panel speakers and a question-and-answer session to follow. He explained that the panel was convened in response to the recent legislative change in perspectives on waste-to-energy and the resulting question of what will happen to current waste-to-energy facilities.

WASTE-TO-ENERGY PANEL:

Tony Hill – Olmsted County Environmental Services/MRRA

Tony Hill gave a brief overview of Minnesota Resources Recovery Association (MRRA), discussed the impact of current facilities such as the Olmstead County system, and touched on some current issues with waste to energy facilities.

MRRA consists of both public and private organizations that represent resource recovery facilities across MN. The recovery facilities of MRRA manage solid waste locally by keeping trash from entering landfills and using it to produce power for their communities. They manage over one million tons of trash and reduce GHG emissions by one ton per ton of processed trash. The Olmstead County System, has one of these such facilities. This integrated solid waste management system, serving both Olmstead and Dodge counties, focuses on waste reduction and education, and houses multiple facilities; a hazardous waste facility, a recycling center, a compost and yard waste site, a waste-to-energy facility, and the Kalmar landfill. Their waste to energy facility runs 24/7 and converts garbage into locally renewable steam and electricity, using 90% of the waste that’s not recycled for this purpose. They process 116,000 tons of waste annually and have diverted 2.7 million tons of garbage from landfills since 1987.

MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN

Tony reported that there are a few big issues facing waste-to-energy facilities, such as the one in the Olmstead County System. For one, the legislature is rethinking the waste hierarchy and looking at putting disposal in one category, which might remove the Olmstead facility as an eligible renewable resource. Additionally, supply chain issues, rising insurance costs and costs of parts, and staffing, continue to be problematic.

Brian Martinson – Environment and Natural Resources Policy Analyst; Association of Minnesota Counties

Brian Martinson gave a legislative overview, including the concerns and implications for waste to energy as a result of current policies and decision making. He reported that his year is the largest budget in state history. However, the environment and energy categories have been merged into one omnibus. There is \$25.88 million of waste prevention and reduction grants with an expanded time period for their use. There is also \$5 million allocated for Solar on public buildings and \$5 million for climate planning and implementation grants. There is money going towards a zero-waste study – which is needed for the waste to energy facilities, a solar end-of-life study, and PUC carbon pipelines. There is also \$4.42 million for PFAS reduction grants and some for water quality and health standards and environmental justice issues: cumulative air pollution impacts, air permit hearings, and air emissions toxins reporting. 100% carbon free energy, waste to energy, and community solar gardens, are also in the current legislation. In 2024, all the legislative members are up for reelection and it's a bonding year. Product stewardship bills, Score, Waste Hierarchy, and Bonding are on the table for solid waste. The waste to energy issue is highly challenged within the current legislative structure. The rules imposed on the facilities, such as odor regulation, and the reporting make it difficult for waste to energy facilities to operate. Brian is working with MRRA and others to educate the legislature on waste to energy facilities but it's been tough.

Jared Graham, Director of Plant Operations of Xcel Energy's Refuse Derived Fuel Plants in Red Wing and Mankato

Anna Thill introduced herself before Jared Graham's presentation. She is a Community Relations Manager with Xcel Energy

Jared Graham discussed the Future of waste-to-energy from Xcel's perspective. At Xcel's Refuse Derived Fuel Plants, they accept refuse derived fuel (RDF) from portions of 13 different MN counties and convert it to electricity for their plants. They are currently seeking approval from the Public Utilities Commission to continue to operate all three facilities for the next 10 years. They get \$2 million in local tax benefits from their three plants and have created 200 waste processing jobs.

Question and Answer Session:

The board and the panelists discussed various questions around waste-to-energy facilities and the current legislature. A question that was at the forefront of the discussion was on how to mitigate the thought process that many have on the need to shut down waste-to-energy facilities.

Lobbying was discussed and Gene asked if the board should be active now with the legislature or if it's better to wait. Sam Richie and Brian M. both agreed that any support the board could give would be great. It is important for counties to continue to tell their story about waste and capacity challenges in an effort to

MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN

find common ground with lawmakers and try to slow down some of the anti – waste-to-energy rhetoric. The possibility of establishing another waste-to-energy facility in SW MN was brought up, and Jared said that it would probably not happen, and that the more likely scenario would be that other facilities would be freed up to accept more waste. Solid Waste Commissioner, Luke Johnson, brought up the closing of the HERC facility, and the fact that this will leave an energy gap with no alternative solution. The conversation ended with the agreement that the board needs to support the lobbyists to keep waste-to-energy as a viable alternative to landfills.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The board and additional guests introduced themselves.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:

M/S/P Commissioner Gene Metz/Commissioner Dennis Groebner to approve the agenda.

MINUTES:

M/S/P Commissioner Steve Flohrs/Commissioner Dennis Welgraven to approve draft minutes from September 25, 2023.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Treasurer Wachal presented the financial report and bills. The contract of services was 132% over budget, so Treasurer Wachal suggested the RMEB should up that budget because Jason’s done some extra work for RMEB in the past year and will continue to do so.

M/S/P Commissioner Jeff Veerkamp/Commissioner Dennis to accept the financial report and pay the bills for \$4,740.00

The need to review the budget in January was addressed.

2024 SRDC Contract

The rates have gone up from \$90-\$100.

M/S/P Commissioner Gary Overgaard /Commissioner Todd Draper to approve the 2024 SRDC Contract

SUBCOMMITTEES AND RMEB BUSINESS:

Executive Committee: *Appel (Chair), VanDeVere, Wildermuth, Wachal*

The nominating committee came up with a new slate of officers; they are recommending Dan Wildermuth for chair, Mic Vandevere for vice-chair, Dennis Welgraven for secretary, and Don Wachal for treasurer.

MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN

FORWARD SLATE OF OFFICERS:

M/S/P Commissioner Gene Metz/ Commissioner Steve Flohrs to approve the slate of officers.

PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) *Wachal (chair), Paap, Metz, Wildermuth, VanDeVere*
Recently approved loan to Tally Ho coffee in Edgerton, of around \$17,000. Current RLF funds are \$120,965.00. There's some activity going on, but nothing that we need to act on now.

Legislative Committee - *Metz (chair), Appel, Flohrs, Wildermuth, Ritter*

There was some discussion on an email about a transmission production tax from the fresh energy group. Sam Richie will look over the email and will give more information on its contents.

The issue of waste-to-energy legislation was brought up again, and questions were asked about what should be done now to impact legislation if anything. Sam Richie responded that there should definitely be a defense of waste-to-energy, and that MRRRA would lead it but would appreciate any support they can get. The board should align with MRRRA and stay close with them as they work on lobbying for waste-to-energy facilities.

A request was made for Jason to do some MRRRA research and reach out to Jared Graham. That information should then be put on the January agenda.

Updates on Energy projects and issues from your respective counties

- **Blue Earth:** Nothing new.
- **Brown:** Jeff – still working on solar garden in Comfrey. Nothing else.
- **Cottonwood:** Big Bend is still on the agenda for possible construction in 2024. Plum Creek was having transmission issues, sold off to another company. Meeting in Westbrook, the project is coming back to life.
- **Faribault:** 3 MW solar farm just north of Blue Earth. Downsized a solar farm in Winnebago.
- **Freeborn:** Solar power is still on hold.
- **Jackson:** Nothing new.
- **Lincoln:** A new group is buying up wind rights – nothing will happen for a couple years because of transmission.
- **Lyon:** MMU is working on a solar farm in city limits.
- **Martin:** Nothing new.
- **Mower:** absent
- **Murray:** A couple projects just outside of Slayton. There's a controversy between them and the city. Have a meeting for a solar farm near Hadley.
- **Nicollet:** Nothing new.
- **Nobles:** Nothing new.
- **Pipestone:** A permit for pipeline still in the works. Another public hearing is coming up.
- **Renville:** 1,100-acre solar garden set up just north of Franklin. Need permits. Could fall through.
- **Redwood:** A proposal.

MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN

- **Rock:** Nothing new.
- **Watonwan:** Nothing new.

SW CERT:

Jason talked about the expansion for CERTs capacity, with lots of new hires including all new CERTs regional coordinators. He mentioned that there will be a more detailed update about seed grant recipients in January. He finished out the CERTs update with mention of two different grant opportunities that would be of interest to RMEB. The **Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement & Planning Grant (RESTEP)** is a \$2 million grant, for CERTS, Commerce, SRDC, RMEB, to be technical assistance providers and provide guidance on siting in the area. It is for big solar and big wind types of projects. The **Transmission Siting and Economic Development (TSED) Grants Program** is money that will be given for community development projects, to communities that would be affected by the transmission lines of a project that's in the works. Wisconsin will be the main applicant, but communities from the Mankato area, southeast to Wisconsin, could benefit. GPI (Great Plains Institute) would probably take the lead in applying for this grant for the affected communities. A quick update on solar for schools was requested, and Jason gave information on Marshall's recent installation.

OTHER BUSINESS AND REPORTS:

NEW BUSINESS

Jason and Chair Appel gave an update on the PUC permitting reform committee meetings. There is now a sincere effort to take some roadblocks and shorten the permitting process. With all the state agencies involved this may be difficult, but at least they're still talking about it.

NEXT MEETING: January 22, 2023.

2024 Meeting Dates: March 25, May 20, July 22, Sept 23, Nov 25

June 3rd – The Morris campus tour is tentatively set for 1-3pm. It's a Monday, which is a day before the commissioner's meeting. We will want to invite the Solid Waste Commission also. No business will need to be taken care of there. We will go just to tour the facilities.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS / GUESTS

ADJOURN:

Chair Appel adjourned the meeting at 2:56 PM.

MINUTES - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023 AT 1:00 P.M.
RURAL MINNESOTA ENERGY BOARD
CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, SLAYTON, MN

Minutes prepared by Nadya Bucklin, Development Planner at SRDC.

Reviewed by:

Approved by:

Mic VanDeVere, Secretary

Tom Appel, Chairman