

**MINUTES - MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2024, 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..... Dan Sparks
Brown County..... Jeffrey Veerkamp	Murray County Dennis Welgraven
Cottonwood County... Tom Appel	Nicollet County Curt Zins
Faribault County Bruce Anderson	Nobles County Gene Metz
Freeborn County Dawn K. (alternate)	Pipestone County Dan Wildermuth
Jackson County Don Wachal	Redwood County Dennis Groebner
Lincoln County Mic VanDeVere	Renville County John Robinson,
Lyon County Todd Draper	Rock County Gary Overgaard
Martin County Steve Flohrs	Watonwan County..... Scott Westman

OTHERS PRESENT: Nadya Bucklin (SRDC), Jason Walker (SRDC), Chris Webb (SRDC), Cora Hoffer (CFRA), Matt Johnson (NextEra) Nathan Dull (Land and Liberty coalition), Rose Patzer (MN State IT Center of Excellence), Adam Gracia (NextEra), Molly Malone (Murray County alternate), Mike Franklin (NextEra), Dallas Roskamp (Pipestone alternate)

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / INTRODUCTIONS

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

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:

M/S/P Commissioner Mic VanDevere /Commissioner Don to approve the agenda.

MINUTES:

M/S/P Commissioner Dennis Welgraven /Commissioner Steve Flohrs to approve draft minutes from November 27, 2023.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Treasurer Wachal presented the financial report and bills.

M/S/P Commissioner Gene Metz /Commissioner Dennis Groebner to accept the financial report and pay the bills of \$12,457.25.

This was followed by a Minnesota Resources Recover Association (MRRRA) membership discussion – the cost is \$750 annually.

M/S/P Commissioner Tom Appel /Commissioner Jeffrey Veerkamp to approve MRRRA membership.

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SUBCOMMITTEES AND RMEB BUSINESS:

Executive Committee: New office appointments were approved on November 27th: *Wildermuth (Chair)*, *VanDeVere (Vice Chair)*, *Welgraven (Secretary)*, *Wachal (Treasurer)*

PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) *Wachal (chair)*, *Paap*, *Metz*, *Wildermuth*, *VanDeVere*

There have been 36 PACE loans closed since the program's inception and seven are getting paid off this year. That leaves 29 loans with a 1,176,000 total balance. Regular payments are made twice a year with property taxes. The payments total about \$61000 per year, and the current loan rate is 5.5%. Two loans are delinquent on payments – one in Lake Benton and a school in Lynd. The request for energy audits has also picked up recently.

Legislative Committee - *Metz (chair)*, *Appel*, *Flohers*, *Wildermuth*, *Sparks*

Gene Metz addressed the permitting reform stakeholder report. He stated there is the potential for a bill to be brought before the legislature that would address some things in that report, and that RMEB should try to make some contacts with committee chairs sometime before the next legislature convenes. Chair Wildermuth asked where we are with waste-to-energy. Tom Appel responded that there haven't been wholesale changes with how we deal with landfills so it's difficult to push the issue now. The use of incinerators was addressed, with the report that there probably won't be a change in the stance on no burning. Tom Appel gave the conclusion that it could take a while to make reforms when it comes to waste-to-energy.

Presentation: NextEra

After an introduction by Mike Franklin, NextEra representatives, Adam Gracia and Matt Johnson, gave updates on current and new projects. This presentation had no specific ask and was instead focused on engaging with RMEB on best practices for clean energy projects in MN counties. Matt Johnson represents community engagement, while Adam represents the later stages of NextEra projects. Adam Gracia led the presentation on NextEra Energy Resources and their focus on local investment, jobs, and clean energy.

NextEra has been investing in MN since 2000. They have several operational sites and development projects: one operational universal solar facility, two operational wind energy centers, one operational battery energy storage system, 29 operational distributed generation solar facilities, two solar projects in development, and two wind projects in development. Adam also mentioned the following projects that are coming soon to MN: Dodge County Wind in Dodge, Steel, and Mower counties – 252 MW, Three waters Wind in Jackson County – 150MW, Timberwolf Solar in Mower County – 100 MW, and Benton Solar in Benton County – 100 MW.

Adam finished out the presentation by bringing up the challenges with developing renewable projects in MN, such as lengthy permit applications and missed statutory timelines. He concluded that better policy is needed around renewable project development and called on RMEB to be a voice to advocate for consistent application of policy. Some ways RMEB can help is by speaking to how renewable energy projects can benefit your communities, advocating with legislature, and clarifying and applying a consistent approach to projects within your local jurisdictions.

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Q & A – Comments:

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session, addressing NextEra’s projects and how both NextEra and RMEB can learn from one another to bring the best proposals to MN counties. NextEra reps answered questions about their various solar and wind projects in several counties in and near the SW region (such as Dodge, Mower, Steele, Murray, Lyon). Many of the projects are 100MW or more and cover 600 or more acres. They also discussed the challenges of transmission and opposition to projects in some counties. Overall, the opposition has been limited to certain projects on a case-by-case basis and is often against either wind or transmission and not so much solar. Concerns over stray voltage and subsonic sound are most common. Gary Overgaard reported that Rock County has a project with NextEra that is going very well and they’re very happy with it. Adam then addressed the importance of looking at different companies’ portfolios and seeing which projects they’ve done, in order to figure out which ones are legitimate.

NextEra reps then discussed the addition of battery storage projects to their business portfolio, which generated lots of questions about how battery storage works, the battery capacity, recycling, and overall environmental impact. Adam explained that with battery storage, you need 10MW per acre, so a 100MW project would need to be on 10 acres. The battery itself is housed in what looks like a shipping container, and is a four-hour battery, which means that in a worst-case scenario (if the grid is completely down) it can provide 100MW of power to the grid for four hours. Since the batteries will eventually have to be replaced, there are now IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) incentives to recycle them to alleviate the environmental impact of battery storage projects. Additionally, because the batteries are housed in shipping containers, there are no battery leaks getting out to the environment. Furthermore, NextEra can monitor all the batteries remotely and works with the local fire departments to be prepared for potential fires or other emergencies. In general, it makes sense for NextEra to add battery storage to their portfolio as energy demand and electricity prices fluctuate. Unlike with battery storage however, NextEra is not looking to do any hydrogen and ammonia storage.

Questions about any project curtailment issues and continued company existence without federal subsidies rounded out the discussion. NextEra rep Adam said that they are not running into any project curtailment issues at this point. If they have any issues with grid capacity, they can use the extra capacity provided by battery storage. Adam also reassured everyone that even without government subsidies and incentives, NextEra has enough infrastructure and resources to continue with current and future projects.

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Updates on Energy projects and issues from your respective counties:

- **Blue Earth:** On the policy side, we met with several legislators and reiterated how important waste-to-energy is. Tomorrow the AMC environmental policy group will meet with MPCA. The Mankato chamber has another event on Jan 25 and will discuss waste-to-energy.
- **Brown:** Nothing new.
- **Cottonwood:** Big Bend Wind will go north of Mt. Lake. Plum creek has been revitalized.
- **Faribault:** Nothing new. Solar project has been stalled.
- **Freeborn:** Dawn K - just listening in...nothing to report.
- **Jackson:** Nothing new.
- **Lincoln:** Nothing new.
- **Lyon:** Two proposed Xcel Energy lines infringe on Lyon County. Xcel has a meeting with property owners to answer questions on Jan 24.
- **Martin:** Nothing new.
- **Mower:** There is a 100 MW Solar project in Mower County. Continuing to work through the siting of the transmission line from the Dodge County Wind Farm into a substation in the northern part of Mower County.
- **Murray:** One small solar project was turned down and denied. Still trying to sign land up for wind.
- **Nicollet:** Nothing new.
- **Nobles:** Nothing new.
- **Pipestone:** Transmission lines, solar.
- **Renville:** There is a battery storage opportunity.
- **Redwood:** Two transmission lines going. One goes right through the middle of the county, and one misses it, so they have to decide which one to use.
- **Rock:** Nothing new.
- **Watonwan:** Nothing new.

SW CERT:

Nadya Bucklin reported on Seed Grants & Empowering Small MN Communities (ESMC). Jason Walker reported on (RSTEP) Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement & Planning Grant. He also announced that SRDC received the MN Dept of Commerce State Competitiveness Fund grant to assist with federal grant writing (IIJA and IRA) over the next three years. All the RDOs in the state received this funding to provide technical assistance through grand education and writing.

OTHER BUSINESS AND REPORTS:

Permitting Reform Stakeholder Report to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (December 31, 2023), was addressed.

Molly Malone asked Jackson County if they receive money from transmission lines. Dan Wachal responded that he doesn't know anything about it.

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NEW BUSINESS

NEXT MEETING: March 25, 2023.

- **2024 Meeting Dates:**
June 3 (Tour Morris Campus), July 22, Sept 23, Nov 25

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS / GUESTS

ADJOURN:

Chair Wildermuth adjourned the meeting at 2:25 PM.

Minutes prepared by Nadya Bucklin, Development Planner at SRDC.

Reviewed by:

Approved by:

Mic VanDeVere, Secretary

Tom Appel, Chairman