

June 15, 2022

Will Seuffert
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2147

RE: Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources
Docket No. IP7041/CN-20-764

Dear Mr. Seuffert:

Attached are the comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department) in the following matter:

In the Matter of the Application of Byron Solar, LLC for a Certificate of Need for the up to 200 MW Byron Solar Project.

The Petition was filed on August 27, 2021 by:

Christina K. Brusven Fredrikson & Byron, P.A. 200 South Sixth Street, Suite 4000 Minneapolis, MN 55402

The Department recommends that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) consider the impacts detailed in the Environmental Report, and, if the impacts are acceptable, **grant the**Certificate of Need. The Department is available to answer any questions the Commission may have.

Sincerely,

/s/ STEVE RAKOW
Analyst Coordinator

SR/ja Attachment



Before the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission

Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce Division of Energy Resources

Docket No. IP7041/CN-20-764

I. INTRODUCTION

A. EXEMPTION REQUEST

On October 12, 2020 Byron Solar, LLC (Byron or the Company) filed the Company's *Request for Exemption from Certain Application Content Requirements* (Exemption Petition). The Exemption Petition provides the Company's proposed exemptions to filing requirements for an up to 200-MW solar generating plant and associated 5-mile 345-kV generation-tie line in Dodge County and Olmsted County (Project).

Also, on October 12, 2020 Byron filed the Company's *Certificate of Need Notice Plan Approval Request* (Notice Petition). The Notice Petition provides the Company's proposed notice plan for the proposed Project.

On October 22, 2020 the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) issued its *Notice of Comment Period*.

On November 3 and 6, 2020 comments on the Exemption Petition and the Notice Petition were filed by the Department and Laborers' International Union of North America, Minnesota & North Dakota (LIUNA).

On November 13 and 16, 2020, Byron Solar filed reply comments.

On January 15, 2021 the Commission issued its *Order Approving Notice Plan, Approving Exemption Requests, and Granting Variances* which approved the Company's proposed notice plan and exemption requests as modified by the Department:

- 1. grant exemptions to the following rules as requested by Applicant:
 - a. 7849.0250 (B) (1);
 - b. 7849.0290;
 - c. 7849.0300; and
 - c. 7849.0330.
- 2. Grant exemptions to the following rules on the condition that if a power purchase agreement is executed prior to application submittal or during the pendency of the certificate of need proceeding, the Applicant must provide equivalent data from any purchaser or any alternative data proposed by the Applicant:

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a. 7949.0240, subp. 2 (B);
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- b. 7849.0250 (B) (2), (3), and (5);
- c. 7849.0250 (C) (7);
- d. 7849.0250 (D);
- e. 7849.0270;
- f. 7849.0280; and
- g. 7849.0340.
- 3. Grant exemptions to the following rules, such that the information to be provided is limited to renewable, sustainable, or clean energy alternatives:
 - a. 7849.0250 (B) (4); and
 - b. 7849.0250 (C) (1) to (6), (8), and (9).
- 4. The data requirements of Minnesota Rules 7849.0260 are not applicable, and no exemptions are needed for the following application content requirements:
 - a. 7949.0280;
 - b. 7849.0290;
 - c. 7849.0300; and
 - d. 7849.0330.

B. CERTIFICATE OF NEED PETITION

On August 27, 2021, Byron filed its *Certificate of Need Application for a Solar Energy Generating System and 345 kV Transmission Line* (Petition) for the proposed Project.

On September 8, 2021, the Commission issued its *Notice of Comment Period* (Notice) requesting comments on the completeness of the Petition.

Between September 9 and 24, 2021 The Department, Minnesota Department of Commerce, Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (DOC-EERA), the Dodge County Board, and LIUNA all filed comments regarding the completeness of the Petition.

On October 1, 2021 Byron filed reply comments regarding completeness.

On November 17, 2021 the Commission issued its *Order Accepting Applications, Setting Review Procedures, Authorizing Task Force, and Granting Variances* (Completeness Order) which stated:

- 1. The Commission accepts the certificate-of-need application as substantially complete.
- 2. The certificate-of-need application shall be reviewed using the informal review process under Minn. R. 7829.1200.

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On May 26, 2022 the Commission issued its *Notice of Commend Period* (Notice). According to the Notice the following topics are open for comment:

- Should the Commission issue a certificate of need for the project?
- Is the proposed project needed and in the public interest?
- What are the costs and benefits of the proposed project?
- Are there any contested issues of fact with respect to the representations made in the
- application?
- Are there other issues or concerns related to this matter?

Below are the comments of the Department regarding the merits of the Petition and the issues in the Notice.

II. DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.2421, subd. 2 (1) defines a large energy facility (LEF) as:

... any electric power generating plant or combination of plants at a single site with a combined capacity of 50,000 kilowatts or more and transmission lines directly associated with the plant that are necessary to interconnect the plant to the transmission system.

As the proposed Project would have a capacity of up to 200 MW (200,000 kilowatts), it qualifies as an LEF. Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 2 states that "no large energy facility shall be sited or constructed in Minnesota without the issuance of a certificate of need by the Commission..." Therefore, a certificate of need (CN) application must be approved by the Commission before the proposed Project can be sited or constructed.

There are several factors to be considered by the Commission in making a determination in CN proceedings. In general, these factors are located in different sections of Minnesota Statutes. Some of the general statutory criteria are reflected in a more specific way in Minnesota Rules 7849.0120. However, some statutory criteria do not appear to be reflected in rules. To clarify the analysis, Department groups all of the statutory and rule criteria into one of five factor categories. Department addresses each of the statutory and rule criteria below. A cross-index matching the statutory and rule criteria to the section where each is addressed along with a summary of the Department's analysis is provided as Attachment 1.

Department notes that we rely on DOC-EERA's Environmental Report (ER) for an analysis of the effects of the proposed Project and the alternatives upon the natural and socioeconomic environments. Department recommends that the Commission consider the ER in making its determination.²

¹ Need Analysis, Link to Planning Process, Alternative Analysis, Socioeconomic Analysis, and Policy Analysis.

² The Commission's Completeness Order required that that environmental review be conducted jointly (in the siting, routing, and need proceedings), to the extent practicable.

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A. NEED ANALYSIS

Overall, the need analysis is governed by Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 (A), which states that a CN must be granted upon determining that:

The probable result of denial would be an adverse effect upon the future adequacy, reliability, or efficiency of energy supply to the applicant, to the applicant's customers, or to the people of Minnesota and neighboring states.

The rule lists five distinct criteria. The Department presents the analysis of the need for the proposed Project in two parts. The first part is designed to address the accuracy of the forecast underlying the claimed need. The second is designed to address any broader reliability needs. Each is addressed separately below.

1. Forecast Analysis

i. Accuracy of the Forecast

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 A (1) states that, in assessing need, the Commission shall evaluate "the accuracy of the applicant's forecast of demand for the type of energy that would be supplied by the proposed facility." The Commission's September 23, 2021 *Order Granting Certificate of Need and Issuing Site Permit and Route Permit* (Plum Creek Order) in Docket Nos. IP6697/CN-18-699, IP6697/WS-18-700, and IP6697/TL-18-701 stated that:

Plum Creek did not use data from a PPA, IRP, or biennial transmission project report to demonstrate demand for the Project. However, under Minnesota statute and rules, there is no requirement that Plum Creek present a PPA, IRP, biennial transmission project report, or any other specific data to demonstrate demand. The Legislature contemplated that independent power producers would construct such projects and did not require them to enter into power purchase agreements before obtaining a certificate of need. Rather, the Commission may evaluate demand using any data it finds persuasive, on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, because Plum Creek is an independent power producer and not a utility, the Commission granted it certain variances to provide alternative data when more appropriate, and the data provided is sufficient to demonstrate demand.

In this case, Plum Creek showed that utilities and commercial and industrial customers have reported strong clean energy goals above and beyond RES requirements, and additional renewable energy sources will be needed to meet that demand. Furthermore, utilities plan to retire coal-based generating units across the region in the coming years, and

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renewable energy sources are expected to fill some of the resulting capacity needs. These established goals and plans are strong evidence of a utility's intention for future energy development and can be used to demonstrate demand, especially when consistent with stated public policy goals. Citation omitted.

As in the Plum Creek Order, Byron was granted an exemption to Minnesota Rules 7849.0270, which requires an applicant to provide information regarding its system peak demand and annual energy consumption.³ Byron was instead required to provide information about regional demand, consumption, and capacity.

In the Petition, Byron cited several sources that create a need for the Project. First, Byron cited:

- The current integrated resource plans (IRP), renewable energy goals, and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions reduction goals of Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy (Xcel);⁴
- the most recently approved IRPs of Otter Tail Power Company (OTP) and Minnesota Power, a public utility operating division of ALLETE, Inc. (MP);⁵ and
- a compliance filing of the Minnesota Transmission Owners (MTO).6

Second, Byron stated that retirements of coal-based generating units are expected across the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, Inc. (MISO) region, and renewable generation resources are expected to fill the resulting capacity needs.⁷

In summary, as in the Plum Creek Order, the proposed plans of OTP, MP, Xcel, and the MTO utilities the regional trend towards retirement of coal units, and, in addition, the existence of a market for projects being sold directly to commercial and industrial consumers all indicate a market exists for new renewable energy. Therefore, the Department concludes that Byron's forecast of the need for the renewable energy expected to be produced by the proposed Project is reasonable.

³ Order Point 2 of the Exemption Order.

⁴ See Docket No. E002/RP-19-368.

⁵ See Docket Nos. E015/RP-15-690 and E017/RP-16-386.

⁶ See Docket No. E999/M-19-205. MTO provided data regarding American Transmission Company, Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Dairyland Power Cooperative, East River Electric Power Cooperative, Great River Energy, ITC Midwest, L&O Power Cooperative, MP, Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Minnkota Power Cooperative, Missouri River Energy Services, Xcel, OTP, Rochester Public Utilities, and Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency.

⁷ Petition at page 44.

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ii. Overall State Energy Needs

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 (1) states that the Commission is to consider "the relationship of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, to overall state energy needs." A review of the most recently filed IRPs indicates that Minnesotans are expected to have little change in their electricity requirements:

- Xcel's IRP includes a 0.2 percent annual average energy growth rate for 2020 to 2034;8
- MP's IRP includes a -0.4 percent annual average energy decline for 2019 to 2034;⁹ and
- OTP's IRP includes a 0.46 percent annual average energy growth rate, prior to conservation programs.¹⁰

However, all three utilities are proposing retirements of large baseload coal units:

- Xcel is proposing to retire the Allen S. King and Sherburne County Generating Station unit 3;
- MP is proposing to retire Boswell Energy Center unit 3; and
- OTP is proposing to withdraw from OTP's 35 percent ownership interest in Coyote Station.

As a result, over time these and other utilities are planning on adding solar generating capacity. The proposed Project could help Minnesota meet its energy needs while supporting the state's renewable energy and GHG reduction goals (see Minnesota Statutes §§ 216B.1691 and 216H.02).

The Department notes that Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1691, subd. 2f requires Xcel, MP and OTP to generate or procure sufficient solar energy to serve at least 1.5% of total retail sales to Minnesota customers by the end of 2020 (the solar energy standard, or SES). Further, subd. 2f(e) states "It is an energy goal of the state of Minnesota that, by 2030, ten percent of retail electric sales in Minnesota be generated by solar energy." Further, Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1691, subd. 2a (Minnesota's renewable energy standard, or RES) requires Xcel generate or procure 30% of retail sales from renewable energy by 2020. Other utilities must generate or procure 25% of retail sales from renewable energy by 2025. Solar energy qualifies for both the SES and RES. However, resources procured to meet the SES cannot be used to meet the RES¹¹ and vice versa. The proposed Project could help Minnesota meet its energy needs while supporting the state's renewable energy and greenhouse gas emissions-reductions goals (see Minnesota Statutes §§ 216B.1691 and 216H.02).

In summary, the Department concludes that the proposed Project fits the state's overall energy needs.

⁸ See Xcel's June 30, 2020 *Supplement: 2020-2034 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan* at Attachment A, Table II-1 in Docket No. E002/RP-19-368.

⁹ See MP's 2021 Integrated Resource Plan at page 21, filed February 1, 2021 in Docket No. E015/RP-21-33.

¹⁰ See OTP's Application for Resource Plan Approval at page 15, filed September 1, 2021 in Docket No. E017/RP-21-339.

¹¹ Minnesota Statutes § 216b.1691, subd. 2a.

2. Reliability Analysis

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (5) states that, in assessing need, the Commission shall evaluate the "benefits of this facility, including its uses to . . . increase reliability of energy supply in Minnesota and the region." Byron will need to apply to the MISO in order to interconnect to the transmission grid. MISO engineers study the impact on the reliability of the electrical system of each addition to the grid and the Department relies upon MISO's analysis. Therefore, the Department concludes that this criterion has been met.

B. LINK TO PLANNING PROCESS

This section discusses the following aspects of this proposal:

- size, type and timing;
- renewable preference; and
- demand-side management (DSM) as an alternative to the proposed Project.

1. Size, Type, and Timing

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 B (1) states that the Commission is to consider "the appropriateness of the size, the type, and the timing of the proposed facility compared to those of reasonable alternatives."

i. Size

Regarding size, the Department notes that, although collective information submitted by the utilities subject to the Minnesota RES indicates that there is sufficient energy in aggregate to meet the RES¹² and SES¹³, this does not consider the potential need for additional renewable resources from individual utilities with insufficient energy to meet RES. Additional for renewable energy may also be required as power purchase agreements involving renewable resources expire. Additionally, utilities in neighboring states may have a need for renewable energy. If the proposed Project is granted a CN and is implemented, it will have to compete with the other renewable energy projects in the solar energy market to fulfill any needs.

Furthermore, the Petition stated that the proposed Project is sized to take advantage of economies of scale while also making efficient use of existing transmission capacity. Based on the discussion above regarding the forecasted solar energy needs for the region, and the Company's economic incentives, the Department concludes that the proposed Project's size is not excessive and therefore is reasonable.

¹² See Docket Nos. E999/M-20-283 and E999/PR-20-12.

¹³ See Docket No. E999/M-20-283.

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ii. Type

The Commission's Exemption Order granted Byron an exemption to Minnesota Rules 7849.0250 (B) (1) – (3), and (5) and a partial exemption to data requirement (4), to the extent that the Rule requires discussion of non-renewable alternatives. Byron stated that as the objective of the proposed Project is to provide renewable energy that will help utilities satisfy renewable energy and other clean energy standards and goals, information regarding non-renewable alternatives would be irrelevant. Given these factors, along with the preference for renewable resources in Minnesota Statutes, the Department concludes that the proposed Project's type is reasonable. The Department notes that the Commission's assessment of the reasonableness of the proposed Project's type will be further informed by the information to be contained in the ER, which will assess the environmental impacts of alternatives.

iii. Timing

Byron stated that the proposed Project is expected to be operational by the end of 2024. The timing of the proposed Project generally coincides or precedes the anticipated need for solar additions of utilities in their IRPs as discussed in the forecast section above. Thus, the proposed Project is timed so as to be available to meet the IRP needs.

It is important to note that there is unlikely to be a one-to-one relationship between CN applications and Minnesota RES and SES obligations. More specifically, the Department notes that:

- there will likely not be a one-to-one match between CN applications based on the regional need for renewable generation and Minnesota utilities' RES and SES compliance level;
- additional renewable resources may be needed for certain Minnesota utilities to meet future RES requirements due to capacity expirations;
- capacity additions are typically added in "chunks" due to the benefits of economies of scale;
- the solar investment tax credit is reduced from 26 percent in 2022 to 22 percent in 2023, which could lead to earlier solar additions than might otherwise be the case;¹⁴ and
- there are uncertainties involved in accomplishing the associated transmission additions or upgrades needed for integrating the output of previously approved and variously located renewable generation projects.

Finally, the Department notes that Minnesota Rules 7849.0400 requires the recipient of a CN to notify the Commission if the proposed in-service date is delayed by more than one year. In summary, the Department concludes that the timing of the proposed Project is reasonable.

¹⁴ The dates and percentages may change due to proposed legislation.

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2. Renewable Preference

There are two sections of Minnesota Statutes that provide a preference for renewable resources in resource planning and acquisition decisions. First, Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3a states that:

The Commission may not issue a certificate of need under this section for a large energy facility that generates electric power by means of a nonrenewable energy source, or that transmits electric power generated by means of a nonrenewable energy source, unless the applicant for the certificate has demonstrated to the Commission's satisfaction that it has explored the possibility of generating power by means of renewable energy sources and has demonstrated that the alternative selected is less expensive (including environmental costs) than power generated by a renewable energy source. For purposes of this subdivision, "renewable energy source" includes hydro, wind, solar, and geothermal energy and the use of trees or other vegetation as fuel.

Second, Minnesota Statues § 216B.2422, subd. 4 states that:

The Commission shall not approve a new or refurbished nonrenewable energy facility in an integrated resource plan or a certificate of need, pursuant to section 216B.243, nor shall the Commission allow rate recovery pursuant to section 216B.16 for such a nonrenewable energy facility, unless the utility has demonstrated that a renewable energy facility is no in the public interest.

Minnesota Statutes indicate a clear preference for renewable facilities; the proposed Project meets a renewable preference.

3. DSM Analysis

The Commission's Exemption Order exempted Byron from providing information on DSM programs, as required by Minnesota Rules 7849.0290, and the potential for reducing the need for this generation project because Byron does not have retail customers and does not operate any DSM programs. However, it is unlikely that the regional needs for solar energy at the scale indicated by Byron could be met through DSM programs. In fact, some of the needs, such as the RES or SES cannot be met by DSM.

C. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

Overall, the analysis of alternatives is governed by Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 B which states that a CN must be granted upon determining that ". . . a more reasonable and prudent alternative to the proposed facility has not been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence on the record." The

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rule then proceeds to list four distinct criteria. The Department breaks down its analysis of the alternatives to the proposed facility into four broad areas:

- alternatives analysis;
- reliability analysis;
- distributed generation (DG); and
- preference for an innovative energy project (IEP) as defined in Minnesota Statutes.

Each area is addressed separately below.

1. Alternatives Analysis

i. Non-CN Facilities Analysis

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 A (4) states that the Commission is to consider "the ability of current facilities and planned facilities not requiring certificates of need to meet the future demand." The primary alternatives to the proposed Project are purchases from renewable facilities outside Minnesota or construction of renewable facilities in Minnesota that are small enough not to require certificates of need (less than 50 MW).

As an IPP, Byron is a producer or seller, rather than purchaser, of electric generation. A renewable facility of less than 50 MW would not contribute as substantial an amount of renewable energy towards the Minnesota RES or towards a utility's need for additional solar resources and would not benefit as much from economies of scale as the proposed Project. In addition, as an IPP Byron has the incentive to site generation in an economically efficient manner inside or outside Minnesota. Further, the Department notes that any party wishing to do so may propose an alternative to the proposed Project; at this time, no party filed such a proposal in this proceeding. Therefore, the Department concludes that current and planned facilities not requiring a CN have not been demonstrated to be more reasonable than the proposed Project.

ii. Cost Analysis

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 B (2) states that the Commission is to consider "the cost of the proposed facility and the cost of energy to be supplied by the proposed facility compared to the costs of reasonable alternatives and the cost of energy that would be supplied by reasonable alternatives." In the Exemption Order the Commission granted Byron an exemption to Minnesota Rules 7849.0250 (C), which requires an applicant to provide a description of alternatives that could provide electric power at the asserted level of need. Only details regarding renewable alternatives need be provided, including an estimate of the proposed Project's effect on wholesale rates in Minnesota or the region.

The Department notes that Byron intends to sell the power produced from the proposed Project to a potential buyer. In the event a PPA is reached with a Minnesota investor-owned utility (IOU), the Commission will have the opportunity to review the terms and costs associated with the PPA in its own proceeding. Additionally, a cost analysis from the Department would take place in that proceeding.

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The Petition included a discussion of alternatives to the proposed Project, including, but not limited to hydropower, biomass, wind, and emerging technologies. Byron relied on cost information from the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration. Byron concluded that solar energy resources have a competitive capital cost and a lower operating cost than other types of renewable resources. The Department concludes that the data provided by Byron is reasonable and demonstrates solar energy's cost advantages and disadvantages relative to other new, renewable sources.

Byron stated that the proposed Project's energy production would be modest in comparison to the annual energy consumption of Minnesota and the region. However, because the proposed Project would not be subject to fluctuations in fuel costs, the Project could help stabilize or lower electricity prices in the state and region. The Department agrees that a solar facility the size of the proposed Project is not likely to have a significant effect on MISO wholesale prices. In aggregate, renewable resources such as wind and solar are dispatched "first" under MISO protocols. Since pricing in the MISO market is based on the last (marginal) resource (typically natural gas or coal), electricity produced by solar facilities in aggregate can decrease the amount of natural gas, coal, or whatever resource is on the margin (the highest priced option) at a given time, that is used for generating electricity.

Based on the above, the Department concludes that the cost of the proposed Project and the cost of energy to be supplied by the proposed Project is reasonable compared to the costs of reasonable alternatives and the cost of energy that would be supplied by reasonable alternatives.

iii. Natural and Socioeconomic Environments Analysis

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 B (3) states that the Commission is to consider "the effects of the proposed facility upon the natural and socioeconomic environments compared to the effects of reasonable alternatives." The proposed Project will have relatively minor pollution impacts. In addition, the Petition states that approximately 1,552.6 acres of predominately agricultural land is necessary to accommodate the final design of the proposed Project.

As an emission-free fuel, solar does not result in releases of CO₂, NO_x, etc. Therefore, consideration of the effects on the natural and socioeconomic environments using the Commission-approved externality values would not impact the overall cost analysis against the proposed Project. Therefore, the Department concludes that this sub-criterion has been met; however, and as noted above, the ER, being conducted concurrently in this proceeding and in the related siting proceeding, will include a full analysis of the effects of the proposed Project and the alternatives upon the natural and socioeconomic environments.

2. Reliability Analysis

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 B (4) states that the Commission is to consider "the expected reliability of the proposed facility compared to the expected reliability of reasonable alternatives." Byron estimated that the proposed Project will have an availability of about 99 percent, which it stated is consistent

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with industry standards.¹⁵ Given such a high availability and MISO's generation accreditation process, the Department concludes that the proposed Project will have a reliability similar to that of reasonable alternatives.

In addition, Byron estimated a net capacity factor of between approximately 25 percent.¹⁶ The Department confirmed that the proposed expected capacity factor is within the National Renewable Energy Laboratory's Utility-Scale Energy Technology Capacity Factors range.¹⁷ Byron stated that the proposed Project would consist of a linear axis tracking system that allows the panels to track the sun's position throughout the day.

In summary, the Department concludes that this sub-criterion has been met.

3. Distributed Generation Analysis

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.2426 states that:

The Commission shall ensure that opportunities for the installation of distributed generation, as that term is defined in section 216B.169, subdivision 1, paragraph (c), are considered in any proceeding under section 216B.2422, 216B.2425, or 216B.243.

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.169 states:

For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the meanings given them...

(c) "High-efficiency, low-emission, distributed generation" means a distributed generation facility of no more than ten megawatts of interconnected capacity that is certified by the commissioner under subdivision 3 as a high efficiency, low-emission facility.

The Department notes that no proposals for distributed generation as an alternative to the proposed Project have been filed in this proceeding. As previously stated, if a buyer is an IOU in the state, the Commission will have the opportunity to review the resulting PPA or facility purchase to ensure that the price and terms are reasonable. Other potential, non-IOU buyers of the proposed Project's output should have an incentive to use the lowest cost resource available. Non-IOU generation and transmission utilities are non-profit, compete for distribution utility clients, and therefore have an incentive to reduce costs. Therefore, the Department concludes that a potential buyer of the proposed Project's output has the incentive to consider all resources available, including distributed generation. The Department concludes that the requirement to consider distributed generation has been met.

¹⁵ See the Petition at page 41.

¹⁶ See the Petition at page 23.

¹⁷ See https://openei.org/apps/TCDB/#blank.

4. Innovative Energy Project (IEP) Preference

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1694, subd. 2 (a) (4) states that an IEP:

... shall, prior to the approval by the commission of any arrangement to build or expand a fossil-fuel-fired generation facility, or to enter into an agreement to purchase capacity or energy from such a facility for a term exceeding five years, be considered as a supply option for the generation facility, and the commission shall ensure such consideration and take any action with respect to such supply proposal that it deems to be in the best interest of ratepayers.

As the proposed Project is not a fossil-fuel-fired generation facility, this statute does not apply.

D. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

Overall, the socioeconomic analysis is governed by Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 C, which states that a CN must be granted upon determining that:

... by a preponderance of the evidence on the record, the proposed facility, or a suitable modification of the facility, will provide benefits to society in a manner compatible with protecting the natural and socioeconomic environments, including human health.

Byron stated that the proposed Project would provide renewable energy with minimal environmental impact, which will help meet the RES, SES, and other needs for solar energy resources. Further, Byron stated that the proposed Project would benefit the local economy will benefit from the landowner purchase payment for the proposed Project, production taxes, income from jobs created, and local spending. Finally, Byron noted that the amount of agricultural land expected to be used by the proposed Project would equal less than one percent of the total agricultural land in Dodge County.¹⁸

As noted above, the Department relies on its ER for its socioeconomic analysis in a CN proceeding. The ER provides information related to:

- Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 A (5) the effect of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, in making efficient use of resources;
- Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 C (2) the effects of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, upon the natural and socioeconomic environments compared to the effects of not building the facility;
- Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 C (3) the effects of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, in inducing future development; and

¹⁸ See the Petition at page 61.

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 Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 C (4) – the socially beneficial uses of the output of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, including its uses to protect or enhance environmental quality.

The Department recommends that the Commission consider the ER filed by the DOC-EERA staff in the Commission's decision in this matter.

E. POLICY ANALYSIS

There are several remaining criteria in statutes and rules that are applicable to a CN but do not closely fit into the need, planning, alternatives, and socioeconomic categories discussed above. Therefore, these criteria are grouped into a final category of policy consideration. In this policy section, the Department addresses criteria related to:

- Policies of other states and federal agencies;
- Promotional practices;
- RES compliance;
- Environmental cost planning;
- Transmission planning compliance; and
- CO₂.

1. Other State and Federal Agencies

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 D states that a CN must be granted on determining that:

the record does not demonstrate that the design, construction, or operation of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification of the facility, will fail to comply with relevant policies, rules, and regulations of other state and federal agencies and local governments.

Byron indicated that the proposed Project serves overall state and regional renewable energy needs. Byron further stated that the proposed Project would meet or exceed the requirements of all federal, state, and local environmental laws and regulations. Byron provided a table listing the potential permits and approvals needed for the proposed Project (see Table 12 in the Petition). The Department has no reason to believe that Byron will fail to comply with the requirements of the listed federal, state, and local governmental agencies.

Further, the Department notes that state agencies authorized to issue permits for the proposed Project are required to present their position and participate in the public hearing process.²⁰ The Department observes that the Commission has consistently considered state agency input in its final CN decisions.

¹⁹ See the Petition at page 29.

²⁰ See Minnesota Statutes, § 216B.243, subd. 7

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Therefore, the Department concludes that the record at this time does not demonstrate that the design, construction, or operation of the proposed Project, or a suitable modification of the facilities, will fail to comply with relevant policies, rules, and regulations of other state and federal agencies and local governments.

2. Promotional Practices

Minnesota Rules 7849.0120 A (3) states that the Commission is to consider "the effects of promotional practices of the applicant that may have given rise to the increase in the energy demand, particularly promotional practices which have occurred since 1974." In the Exemption Order, the Commission granted Byron an exemption to Minnesota Rules 7849.0240, subp. 2 (B), which calls for the applicant to provide a summary of the promotional practices that may have given rise to the demand for the facility. The exemption was granted because Byron does not have captive retail customers to consider. Nonetheless, Byron stated that it has not engaged in promotional activities that could have given rise to the need for the electricity to be generated by the proposed Project.²¹ The Department concludes that this sub-criterion has been met.

3. RES Compliance

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (10) states that the Commission shall evaluate "whether the applicant or applicants are in compliance with applicable provisions of sections 216B.1691 ..." Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1691 relates to Minnesota's RES. Given that Byron has no retail customers in Minnesota, the Department concludes that this statute does not apply.

4. Environmental Cost Planning

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (12) states that the Commission shall evaluate "if the applicant is proposing a nonrenewable generating plant, the applicant's assessment of the risk of environmental costs and regulation on that proposed facility over the expected useful life of the plant, including a proposed means of allocating costs associated with that risk." In this case, Byron is proposing a renewable generation facility. Therefore, this statute does not apply.

5. Transmission Planning Compliance

Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (10) states that the Commission shall evaluate:

whether the applicant or applicants are in compliance with applicable provisions of section 216B.1691 and 216B.2425, subdivision 7, and have filed or will file by a date certain an application for certificate of need under this section or for certification as a priority electric transmission project

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²¹ See the Petition at page 18.

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under section 216B.2425 for any transmission facilities, or upgrades identified under section 216B.2425, subdivision 7.

Regarding transmission for the proposed Project, Byron stated that as an IPP, this statute does not apply to Byron.²² Regarding interconnection, Byron stated that the proposed Project is proposed to interconnect to the grid via a proposed 3-mile long above-ground 345 kV transmission tie line that will connect the proposed Project with the Byron Substation.²³

Regarding new transmission, Byron "has no plans to become involved in owning or operating transmission lines beyond the collection, and feeder lines and Project Transmission Line that will be needed for interconnection of the Project." Since Minnesota Statutes § 216B.2425 is applicable only to entities that own or operate electric transmission lines in Minnesota, the Department concludes that this statute does not apply.

6. Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Minnesota Statutes § 216H.03, subd. 3 states that "on and after August 1, 2009, no person shall: (1) construct within the state a new large energy facility that would contribute to statewide power sector carbon dioxide emissions." The Department notes that the proposed Project will not contribute to statewide power sector CO_2 emissions.

F. RESPONSE TO COMMISSION NOTICE

1. Should the Commission issue a certificate of need for the project?

Based upon the above analysis the Department recommends that the Commission issue a certificate of need for the proposed project.

2. *Is the proposed project needed and in the public interest?*

Based upon the above analysis the Department concludes that the proposed Project is needed and is in the public interest.

3. What are the costs and benefits of the proposed project?

As discussed throughout these comments, the costs of the proposed Project are:

- direct financial costs such as operation and maintenance expenses, capital costs, etc., to be incurred by the Company;
- indirect financial costs such as increased congestion on the transmission grid, to be incurred by all projects in the region; and

²² See the Petition at page 28.

²³ See the Petition at page 32.

²⁴ See the Petition at page 37.

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• The non-financial costs such as noise, visual impacts and so forth, to be incurred by the local community.

The benefits of the proposed Project include such items as:

- additional energy and capacity generated by the proposed Project;
- increased reliability of energy supply in Minnesota and the region;
- landowner payments, production taxes, income from jobs created, and local spending; and
- reduced emissions of several pollutants.
 - 4. Are there any contested issues of fact with respect to the representations made in the application?

The Department does not have any contested issues of fact with respect to the representations made in the Petition.

5. Are there other issues or concerns related to this matter?

The Department has no other issues or concerns related to this matter.

III. DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the above analysis, the Department recommends that the Commission determine that Byron has shown that:

- the probable result of denial would be an adverse effect upon the future adequacy, reliability, or efficiency of energy supply to the applicant, to the applicant's customers, or to the people of Minnesota and neighboring states;
- a more reasonable and prudent alternative to the proposed facility has not been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence in the record; and
- the record does not demonstrate that the design, construction, or operation of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification of the facility, will fail to comply with relevant policies, rules, and regulations of other state and federal agencies and local governments.

Should the Commission find, after consideration of the ER, that the proposed facility "will provide benefits to society in a manner compatible with protecting the natural and socioeconomic environments, including human health," the Department recommends that the Commission issue a CN to Byron.

Department Attachment 1

Rules and Statutes Addressed in the Comments

Statute or Rule Citation	Department Comment	Location
7849.0120 CRITERIA. A certificate of need must be granted to the applicant on determining that:		
A. the probable result of denial would be an adverse effect upon the future adequacy, reliability, or efficiency of energy supply to the applicant, to the applicant's customers, or to the people of Minnesota and neighboring states, considering:		
(1) the accuracy of the applicant's forecast of demand for the type of energy that would be supplied by the proposed facility;	Byron's forecast of the need for the renewable energy expected to be produced by the proposed Project is reasonable.	II.A.1.i
(2) the effects of the applicant's existing or expected conservation programs and state and federal conservation programs;	it is unlikely that the regional needs for solar energy at the scale indicated by Byron could be met through DSM programs	II.B.3
(3) the effects of promotional practices of the applicant that may have given rise to the increase in the energy demand, particularly promotional practices which have occurred since 1974;	Byron does not have captive retail customers	II.E.2
(4) the ability of current facilities and planned facilities not requiring certificates of need to meet the future demand; and	current and planned facilities not requiring a CN have not been demonstrated to be more reasonable	II.C.1.i
(5) the effect of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, in making efficient use of resources;	addressed in environmental report	II.D
B. a more reasonable and prudent alternative to the proposed facility has not been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence on the record, considering:		
(1) the appropriateness of the size, the type, and the timing of the proposed facility compared to those of reasonable alternatives;	 the proposed Project's size is not excessive and therefore is reasonable; the proposed Project's type is reasonable; the timing of the proposed Project is reasonable. 	• II.B.1.i; • II.B.1.ii; • II.B.1.iii.
(2) the cost of the proposed facility and the cost of energy to be supplied by the proposed facility compared to the costs of reasonable alternatives and the cost of energy that would be supplied by reasonable alternatives;	the data provided by Byron is reasonable and demonstrates solar energy's cost advantages and disadvantages relative to other new, renewable sources	II.C.1.ii

Minnesota

Department Attachment 1 Rules and Statutes Addressed in the Comments

Statute or Rule Citation Location **Department Comment** using the Commission-approved (3) the effects of the proposed facility upon the natural and externality values would not impact socioeconomic environments compared to the effects of II.C.1.iii the overall cost analysis against the reasonable alternatives; and proposed Project (4) the expected reliability of the proposed facility the proposed Project will have a compared to the expected reliability of reasonable reliability similar to that of II.C.2 reasonable alternatives alternatives; C. by a preponderance of the evidence on the record, the proposed facility, or a suitable modification of the facility, will provide benefits to society in a manner ompatible with protecting the natural and socioeconomic environments, including human health, considering: (1) the relationship of the proposed facility, or a suitable the proposed Project fits the state's II.A.1.ii modification thereof, to overall state energy needs; overall energy needs (2) the effects of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, upon the natural and socioeconomic II.D addressed in environmental report environments compared to the effects of not building the facility; (3) the effects of the proposed facility, or a suitable II.D addressed in environmental report modification thereof, in inducing future development; and (4) the socially beneficial uses of the output of the proposed facility, or a suitable modification thereof, including II.D addressed in environmental report its uses to protect or enhance environmental quality; and D. the record does not demonstrate that the design construction, or operation of the proposed facility, or a the record at this time does not suitable modification of the facility, will fail to comply with demonstrate that ... the proposed II.E.1 relevant policies, rules, and regulations of other state and Project ... will fail to comply federal agencies and local governments. Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243 subd. 3 (9) with respect to a high-voltage transmission line, the benefits of enhanced regional reliability, access, or deliverability to the this statute does not apply N/A extent these factors improve the robustness of the transmission system or lower costs for electric consumers in

Department Attachment 1

Rules and Statutes Addressed in the Comments

Statute or Rule Citation	Department Comment	Location
Minnesota Statutes §§ 216B.243 subd. 3a & 216B.2422, subd. 4 The Commission may not issue a certificate of need under this section for a large energy facility that generates electric power by means of a nonrenewable energy source, or that transmits electric power generated by means of a nonrenewable energy source, unless the applicant for the certificate has demonstrated to the Commission's satisfaction that it has explored the possibility of generating power by means of renewable energy sources and has demonstrated that the alternative selected is less expensive (including environmental costs) than power generated by a renewable energy source	the proposed Project meets a renewable preference	II.B.2
Minnesota Statutes § 216B.2426 The Commission shall ensure that opportunities for the installation of distributed generation, as that term is defined in section 216B.169, subdivision 1, paragraph (c), are considered	the requirement to consider distributed generation has been met	II.C.3
Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1694, subd. 2 (a) (4) An innovative energy projectshall, prior to the approval by the commission of any arrangement to build or expand a fossil-fuelfired generation facility, or to enter into an agreement to purchase capacity or energy from such a facility for a term exceeding five years, be considered as a supply option for the generation facility, and the commission shall ensure such consideration and take any action with respect to such supply proposal that it deems to be in the best interest of ratepayers;	this statute does not apply	II.C.4
Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243 subd. 3 (10) Compliance with § 216B.1691 whether the applicant or applicants are in compliance with applicable provisions of sections 216B.1691 and 216B.2425, subdivision 7	this statute does not apply	II.E.3
Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (12) if the applicant is proposing a nonrenewable generating plant, the applicant's assessment of the risk of environmental costs and regulation on that proposed facility over the expected useful life of the plant, including a proposed means of allocating costs associated with that risk	this statute does not apply	II.E.4

Department Attachment 1

Rules and Statutes Addressed in the Comments

Statute or Rule Citation	Department Comment	Location
Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243, subd. 3 (10) Compliance with § 216B.2425, subd. 7 whether the applicant or applicants are in compliance with applicable provisions of sections 216B.1691 and 216B.2425, subdivision 7	this statute does not apply	II.E.5
Minnesota Statutes § 216H.03 on and after August 1, 2009, no person shall construct within the state a new large energy facility that would contribute to statewide power sector carbon dioxide emissions	the proposed Project will not contribute to statewide power sector CO_2 emissions	II.E.6

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

Minnesota Department of Commerce Comments

Docket No. IP7041/CN-20-764

Dated this 15th day of June 2022

/s/Sharon Ferguson

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First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
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First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
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First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
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