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PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING - 25-269
New York Mills, Minnesota - December 4, 2025 - 6:00 p.m.
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Application of Great River Energy
and Lake Region Electric Cooperative for a Route Permit
for the Otto Tap 115 kV Transmission Line Project in
Otter Tail County, Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. ET2/TL-25-269

Meeting held at:

Otto Township Town Hall
50453 County Highway 14
New York Mills, Minnesota
December 4, 2025

COURT REPORTER: Ruth Holdvogt, RPR

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I N D E X

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1 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Good evening.
2 Welcome to the meeting of the Otto Tap Transmission
3 Project. My name's Craig Janezich. I work with the
4 PUC.

5 This is the second of two meetings. We
6 had a virtual meeting late -- no, not late -- about
7 6:00 p.m. yesterday.

8 Just a brief -- we'll do a brief -- brief
9 overview of the meeting. This -- since we do not
10 have slides, it's this one I'm working off of right
11 here.

12 There will be a brief introduction by
13 myself; a description of the project by Mark here;
14 and then my colleague, Suzanne, will talk about the
15 permit application review process. And then, if
16 people have questions or comments, they're feel --
17 they're free to -- to have those comments or ask
18 questions.

19 Just a few ground rules that we have, is
20 just be respectful. Reasonable people can disagree
21 about a project. And, of course, take turns
22 commenting. The court reporter needs to take down
23 everything you may -- you say. So if you do want to
24 speak, please say your first and last name, and
25 spell it for the court reporter.

1 The first slide here. This is the slide
2 I'll be working off here now.

3 So the purpose of the meeting is for us
4 to get input from the public about the project so we
5 can compile a record and inform the Commission, and
6 the Commission can make an informed decision about
7 the project.

8 Again, you can ask us questions, concerns
9 you may have about the project, things you would
10 want to see in the permit -- as a permit condition
11 that the Commission would consider if they go -- if
12 they do have -- go ahead and -- and permit the
13 project.

14 Moving on just a little, information
15 about the Public Utilities Commission. We regulate
16 electrical, natural gas, and landline telephone
17 utilities. We set rates and serve -- and we provide
18 standards. We issue route and site permits for
19 large energy facilities.

20 There's five total Commissioners.
21 They're appointed by the governor and confirmed by
22 the senate, and they make the final decisions on
23 permits and whether to permit the project.

24 I'll go ahead and hand it off to Mark --

25 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Yeah. Thanks, Craig.

1 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: -- Strohfus.

2 MR. MARK STROHFUS: So this is a joint
3 project between --

4 MS. SUZANNE STEINHAUER: Tell them who
5 you are.

6 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Oh, I'm sorry.

7 I'm Mark Strohfus with Great River
8 Energy. Thank you.

9 And this is a joint project between Great
10 River Energy -- we're the wholesale energy provider
11 and transmission provider for Lake Region Electric
12 Cooperative. And Lake Region Electric Cooperative
13 is a co-applicant in this project, as they will be
14 building a new 115-kV substation to serve the
15 locals' needs around the project area here.

16 Let's flip to the next page, the map. I
17 think everybody is -- we've talked with everybody
18 here about this. But the project is proposed to --
19 to be a 2.9-mile line. It's going to start at the
20 existing Otto Substation. The tap will extend a
21 little bit further than the existing substation, as
22 Lake Region is planning to build the -- the new
23 substation directly adjacent and south of the
24 existing substation.

25 It'll extend up the west side of 470th

1 Avenue. Then, at 410th Street, it's going to turn
2 east and stay on the south side, and eventually
3 cross diagonally across Highway 10 to a new switch
4 structure, which we'll install on the existing
5 115-kV line on that side of the highway.

6 Why are we doing this project? The next
7 slide. This is really all about providing reliable
8 energy services to the local customers here. It
9 has -- at 115 kV, it has room for expansion and
10 additional load growth if people want to put in more
11 irrigation systems perhaps, new homes, new
12 businesses.

13 When we start projects like this, the
14 first thing we do is, we kind of pull up our GIS
15 system and look at maps, see what's out there, look
16 for homes. We like to avoid homes if we can, so --
17 because we have to cut trees. And so if those homes
18 are in close proximity to the roads, we tend to open
19 up those homes to the -- the view of the road.

20 It's important for us to follow existing
21 infrastructure road right-of-way. Road right-of-way
22 is beneficial for at least two reasons. One, it's
23 existing disturbed areas, so a new transmission line
24 doesn't seem so disruptive. And, two, we can
25 overlap our right-of-way needs.

1 We will be requesting -- if the permit is
2 issued by the Public Utilities Commission, we'll be
3 requesting a 100-foot total right-of-way, 55 feet
4 either side of center line from the property owners.
5 But by placing -- typically, on our construction, we
6 would place our new structures about five feet
7 outside of road right-of-way, and so 45 feet of that
8 100-foot right-of-way is extending over roads.

9 And the purpose we do -- that we do that
10 for is, we know that nobody's going to grow trees in
11 the roads or -- or build new buildings there, so
12 it's an easy way for us to get the clearance that we
13 need.

14 On the landowners' side, then, we would
15 be seeking that 55 feet, five feet from the road
16 right-of-way, and another feet -- 50 feet into their
17 property for right-of-way.

18 So sometimes we have a large open house;
19 we do invitations to all of the affected landowners.
20 On this particular project, because we had so few
21 landowners, Madalynn, our land rights agent on this
22 project, contacted all of the affected landowners,
23 had conversations with them.

24 And we want to make sure they understand
25 what we're doing. If they have questions or

1 concerns, that we can answer those beforehand.
2 We've had great -- great reactions from all of the
3 landowners here, so it makes it pretty easy us
4 for -- for us to continue moving forward.

5 We continue, then, and we look -- start
6 looking at information that's available from a lot
7 of the state agencies out there. There's a whole
8 list here: DNR, US Fish & Wildlife Service, the
9 Department of Transportation. We'll have to engage
10 them throughout the project.

11 Again, if the permit is issued, we'll
12 have a crossing over Highway 10, so we need to work
13 with MnDOT on that. We do that on a regular basis.

14 Soil and Water Conservation District has
15 been engaged. The Department of Agriculture is
16 aware of the project. The State Historic
17 Preservation Office, we will have a survey --
18 archeological survey done on the project. There was
19 a former Native site -- Native American site that
20 supposedly was destroyed, but we've been asked to go
21 out and get an archeologist out to confirm that, so
22 that will be part of the project as well. There's a
23 whole process with engagement of tribal --

24 Yep?

25 MR. DEREK GEISER: I just want to ask

1 what township or where that location --

2 (Court reporter off-record comment.)

3 MR. DEREK GEISER: Derek Geiser, Otto
4 Township.

5 MR. MARK STROHFUS: That is,
6 unfortunately, confidential information.

7 MR. DEREK GEISER: Okay.

8 MR. MARK STROHFUS: I can't -- I can't
9 provide that.

10 MR. DEREK GEISER: Okay.

11 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Sorry.

12 MR. DEREK GEISER: So we don't know if
13 they'll be digging in Otto Township or not, then,
14 the -- the archeologists?

15 MR. MARK STROHFUS: No. I can't -- I...
16 Yeah, I can't -- I can't say that.

17 I can tell you if they do any digging,
18 it's --

19 MR. DEREK GEISER: They would notify us,
20 I hope?

21 MR. MARK STROHFUS: They would -- we -- I
22 can certainly ask them to do that.

23 MR. DEREK GEISER: I would -- yeah, we
24 would like to know that.

25 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Okay.

1 But, typically, what they do is, they dig
2 about six inches down into the soil, run it through
3 a screen system, and then put it back.

4 MR. DEREK GEISER: Okay.

5 MR. MARK STROHFUS: So we're not doing,
6 you know, deep excavations or anything.

7 I'm pretty confident that the site has
8 been destroyed by existing development.

9 But we can certainly let them know.

10 So under the new -- a new state statutory
11 process for route permits, the applicants are now
12 writing the Environmental Assessment. So all of
13 that information that we gather through the state
14 agencies, the federal agencies, the state
15 historical, and the tribes get compiled in our
16 application. It's Chapter 6.

17 I do have a couple copies of the
18 application here if people really want to take one
19 home. We'll have electric -- electronic ones posted
20 on our -- Great River Energy's website, and it will
21 be on the docket as well. So we can get you
22 electronic copies, too.

23 But that kind of walks through the
24 overall impacts that the project will have as a
25 result of construction and operation, and then what

1 we do to mitigate those impacts. So this kind of
2 lists out several of the common things that we see.

3 As I mentioned, we minimize new
4 right-of-way by parallel -- paralleling existing
5 roads. It's primarily -- the line is primarily
6 crossing agricultural properties, so, again, we're
7 missing the residential properties. There are homes
8 across the street from some of these, so it's harder
9 for us to put the line on the east side of 470th or
10 the north side of 410th Street because of those.

11 It's 115 k -- kilovolts. That's
12 compatible with center pivot irrigation systems.
13 Madalynn will be having conversations with RDO and
14 Huebsch Family Farms. They operate center pivot
15 irrigation systems. Sometimes we need the -- if
16 they have end guns, we need to modify those, we'd
17 pay for those modifications.

18 As I mentioned, there is one residential
19 parcel that is impacted by the -- by the proposed
20 transmission line. We've had conversations with the
21 landowner, their home is fairly far off the road,
22 and they seem to be okay with this plan moving
23 forward.

24 There are existing distribution lines on
25 both the -- the roads here and on the sides we plan

1 to build on. We will bury those except for a
2 crossing of a natural gas or oil pipeline coming
3 through there, where the distribution line will
4 probably pop up overhead for one span, two
5 structures, and then go back underground.

6 There's really minimal tree clearing
7 out -- necessary out here. There is a section of
8 wetlands to the south, a stream coming through
9 there. We'll be able to likely span that wetland so
10 we won't have to put structures in the wetland, but
11 we will have to clear some trees.

12 And, you know, what's -- when's
13 construction happening? We do daytime construction.
14 I see no reason to do nighttime construction. I
15 suppose there's a rare chance we might do the span
16 over Highway 10 in later hours, when traffic is
17 lower. But I think we often, in situations like
18 this, do a rolling road block with the highway
19 patrol. So I think that should be pretty easy.

20 So if the Public Utilities Commission
21 eventually issues us a route permit for this, then
22 we start having one-on-one engagement with the
23 landowners again, specifically to negotiate an
24 easement and compensation for the right-of-way.
25 Again, we're seeking 100 feet, 50 feet either side,

1 but in this case, it's overlapping road right-of-way
2 in both -- both segments.

3 Madalynn will come out, present an
4 easement document, an offer of compensation.
5 Compensation is based on property value assessments
6 in the area. And she'll provide information on how
7 we access their property. If there's fences -- and
8 I don't think we have any livestock on this, but if
9 there's existing fences, we may ask to put in a
10 temporary gate or a permanent gate that we could use
11 to access for future maintenance. All of these
12 things will be discussed again and negotiated with
13 the landowners. So we'll talk about construction
14 and maintenance practices and restoration.

15 Finally, when the project's over, we come
16 back out. We fix any damage to the property.
17 Madalynn will send a letter out to each affected
18 landowner and ask are they happy with what we've
19 done. If not, we get back into negotiations and we
20 get things done.

21 As I mentioned, we will notify landowners
22 before we come out for any actual construction.
23 Once the easements are issued, we'll come out.
24 We'll stake -- survey and stake the property, stake
25 out structure locations.

1 Early -- we'll have some early
2 indication, too -- Madalynn will have that when she
3 first starts talking about easements, structure
4 locations. We can often move things if a landowner
5 says, you know, "Oh, you know, I -- I wanted to put
6 a drive -- access drive through my property right
7 there." You know, we can push the pole ten feet one
8 way or another, typically, and not affect the
9 overall design.

10 She'll talk about tree clearing.

11 Then we'll come out with our construction
12 crews. They'll bore holes for the structures. They
13 typically frame the -- the poles, the structures on
14 the ground, drop it in the hole. We'll eventually
15 hang pulleys on that and string conductors through
16 there and secure it, clamp it in to each pole.
17 After that, the line is energized. And then that's
18 when, kind of, final restoration will truly begin.

19 We will maintain things to our -- the
20 best of our ability during construction. While we
21 won't -- we won't be required to get a storm water
22 construction permit from the Minnesota Pollution
23 Control Agency for this, we still do implement best
24 management practices, and put up sedimentation and
25 erosion best -- best management practices to avoid

1 sediments running off and -- specifically, into
2 streams and other things.

3 And, lastly, slides show our contact
4 information. Again, I'm Mark Strohfus. I work on
5 the route permit and the agency permitting that will
6 happen once -- once, and if, the PUC issues us a
7 route permit. And then Madalynn's contact
8 information is in there as well, and she will be
9 contacting each of the affected landowners.

10 At any point in time, we'll have a
11 construction rep -- field rep onsite. We provide
12 that information to the local government units and
13 all of the affected landowners and -- and
14 neighboring landowners. So if they have questions,
15 they can call a guy onsite, ask questions, and get
16 things fixed if they have concerns about something
17 that's happening there.

18 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Thanks, Mark.

19 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Thank you.

20 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: When the Commission
21 decides on a permit on a project, we look at the
22 potential health and environmental impacts.
23 Basically, if you can think of an impact on you and
24 your surroundings, it's something that the
25 Commission considers. There's a -- there's a long

1 list of them in the statute.

2 When we -- the other thing we do is, many
3 of the ideas that you all provide on ways -- should
4 the -- the Commission permit the project, the ideas
5 that the public provides to mitigate some of the
6 impacts of the project really are crucial, and it
7 helps -- we typically -- the Commission will take
8 those ideas and decide whether or not to put them in
9 the permit as permitted conditions.

10 We also -- should the project be
11 permitted, we -- we follow through. We look at
12 documents, pre-filing documents, and make sure that
13 the project is being built to the spec that was
14 presented to the public and provided to the
15 Commission.

16 And then, of course, we'll also be
17 monitoring site restoration and -- when the project
18 is -- is complete.

19 This last slide, it's a review schedule.
20 It kind of gives you a general sense of not only the
21 timeline but the process.

22 I can find the slide, make sure I...
23 Here. It's this one right here.

24 Of course, we're having -- this is the
25 second of -- of two meetings. After this meeting,

1 we'll have a -- the Commission will issue a draft
2 site and site permit, and then they decide on the
3 need for an EA addendum. That typically will
4 happen, we expect, in January of 2026.

5 We will come, likely, back here, within
6 this area, with an Administrative Law Judge. They
7 will hear -- you'll have the benefit of having --
8 whether or not we did an EA addendum or not -- the
9 entire record, and you can present your comments to
10 an Administrative Law Judge. And they will take
11 those comments, and they will use them and the
12 entire record to write a report to the Commission.
13 We anticipate that to be in the spring or summer of
14 2026.

15 There will be a period -- let's say the
16 judge makes a recommendation that, as a landowner,
17 you -- you disagree with. There will be an
18 opportunity to write to the Commission about an
19 exception that you think maybe that the ALJ got
20 wrong.

21 And then, of course, the Commission will
22 take all of that information, including the ALJ's
23 report, the entire record, and they will make a -- a
24 final decision on the permit. We anticipate that to
25 be in the spring/summer of 2026. So that's just a

1 general timeline of the project.

2 And then I'll hand it off to Suzanne, my
3 colleague.

4 MS. SUZANNE STEINHAUER: Hi. My name is
5 Suzanne Steinhauer. I'm also with the Public
6 Utilities Commission. I'm the environmental review
7 manager for this project.

8 So as Craig pointed out, in the schedule,
9 we're still kind of at the top, so pretty early in
10 the schedule, and there are several other milestones
11 before the Commission makes its determination on the
12 permit.

13 So what happens next? Based on the
14 information in the record, which include the
15 comments we receive here tonight and any written
16 comments by December 18th, the Commission needs to
17 make two preliminary -- preliminary decisions. The
18 first is determining whether an Environmental
19 Assessment -- I'm sorry -- an EA addendum is
20 necessary before the hearing can be held. And the
21 second is what should be included in the draft
22 permit.

23 So the first question, is an EA addendum
24 necessary? So, by law, applications must include an
25 Environmental Assessment that includes information

1 on the human environmental impacts and ways to
2 mitigate the identified impacts. As Mark talked
3 about in some detail, in this -- for this project,
4 that EA is Chapter 6 of their application.

5 And they identify any -- any project, any
6 physical construction in the real world, is going to
7 have impacts. He highlighted what they found some
8 of the impacts would be.

9 What we're looking for -- one of the
10 things we're looking for tonight is comments on
11 potential impacts and mitigation measures that
12 weren't fully developed, or things that you -- you
13 can think of that you have questions about. And
14 we'll use that information -- the Commission will
15 use that information to decide if some sort of
16 supplement will be necessary before we hold a
17 hearing.

18 So are there potential impacts or unique
19 characteristics of either the project or this area
20 that we're missing from the application? Are there
21 mitigation measures that require further evaluation?

22 And one of the mitigation measures for
23 some projects -- for some transmission projects is
24 alternative routes. So are there other routes that
25 the Commission should look at? The application

1 discussed one minor route alternative, which would
2 be crossing Highway 10 a little bit earlier and
3 coming straight south. But are there others that we
4 should look at?

5 So the second question is, what should be
6 in the draft permit? So a draft permit identifies
7 where and how the permittee can construct the
8 project, describes the proposed project and the
9 location, includes proposed permit conditions.

10 There is -- I don't know if you had an
11 opportunity. There is -- in the back of the room,
12 there is a sample permit for a transmission line.
13 This is just the standard conditions.

14 A draft permit, I want to make clear,
15 doesn't allow the applicants to construct the
16 project. It provides a starting point for the
17 Commission, the public, and the judge to consider.

18 So one of the things that we're --
19 another thing that we're looking for here tonight
20 is, are there unique aspects of the project where
21 you think some special conditions should be required
22 that's not identified in the standard conditions?

23 Either let us know verbally tonight or by
24 the 18th, and we'll make some assessment about how
25 that could -- might be handled in the permit.

1 So your comments help us develop special
2 conditions, and then, over time, these standard
3 conditions get revised. We learn more about the
4 kinds of projects and the kinds of impacts they
5 have.

6 So the next slide, how to comment.
7 You're here tonight. You can -- we can take your
8 verbal comments. I know a lot of you had questions
9 when you came in, and you spoke to either Craig or
10 me or Mark or -- or other representatives from the
11 applicants. And we hope that we answered your
12 questions, but they're not in the record.

13 So if you have comments that you want to
14 make sure that everybody knows about, we're going to
15 open that up in just a couple minutes, and we'd like
16 to get that information in the record. We'll be
17 around afterwards, we can try to answer your
18 questions, but it won't be part of the record.

19 So written comments are due
20 December 18th. You can speak tonight. If you think
21 of something, if you talk to your neighbors, they
22 have other things... We just need it in writing by
23 December 18th.

24 So just a couple -- this is getting a
25 little bit into the nitty-gritty. So what we're

1 looking for tonight -- we're trying to answer your
2 questions; but, also, these are the -- the comments
3 that are helpful to us. Comments on human
4 environmental impacts. What information needs more
5 development in an EA addendum.

6 I had -- there's some just real brief
7 examples of the kinds of projects we would expect
8 from a transmission line of this size. It sits
9 obviously in an agricultural area. There are
10 certain standard conditions they need to -- if drain
11 tiles are damaged, they need to restore those. They
12 need to restore the route. There are -- they need
13 to coordinate with local road authorities.
14 Sometimes we have special conditions for that.

15 Let's see. Wildlife. What are the
16 wildlife impacts? What are the safety impacts, both
17 for the construction workers and for the general
18 public?

19 So some of the impacts are unavoidable,
20 but we want to make sure there is enough information
21 here on -- on what the impacts are so that everybody
22 understands what the project is and there -- there
23 aren't any surprises.

24 The other thing that we're asking for
25 tonight are comments on potential mitigation

1 measures. So like we've talked about, any project
2 is going to have impacts. We're looking for ways to
3 avoid, minimize, or otherwise mitigate those
4 impacts.

5 I had some examples of mitigation
6 measures that are -- some of them are going to be in
7 the permit. We -- the permit will identify
8 anticipated alignment, and Mark talked about that.
9 In -- in this project, it's generally going to be on
10 the side of the road where the -- where the
11 distribution line is. Sometime -- in some projects,
12 there may be some areas where you think crossing to
13 the opposite side of the road would make sense.
14 Those are things we want to know about.

15 Or the -- like I had mentioned, are there
16 alternative routes or segments we should look at?
17 Are there snowmobile trails that need some sort of
18 coordination? Construction techniques that are
19 pertinent to this part of the country or this
20 particular project? Is there a need for bird flight
21 diverters? Are there additional natural resources?

22 So those are the kinds of mitigation
23 measures that sometimes we discover over the -- when
24 we're reviewing the project.

25 Then, there's just kind of a summary

1 slide that, if we had -- if we had the PowerPoint
2 I'd leave up, but I think we can -- we can reference
3 that if we need to.

4 So I want to reiterate, we've talked a
5 lot about the comments that we would like, but we're
6 also here to try to answer your questions. And
7 we'll do that in just a minute.

8 We'll -- I'm going to kind of whiz
9 through what Craig said about the commenting
10 etiquette. One speaker at a time. There's a court
11 reporter, so we'd like an accurate record of the
12 meeting tonight. Please take a minute to state and
13 spell your name for the court reporter, and we will
14 remind you if -- if you forget to do that.

15 Please limit your comments to a few
16 minutes. You can come back once everyone has had a
17 chance.

18 Maintain respect for others. As Craig
19 mentioned, reasonable people can disagree.

20 There's a reason why there's a process
21 and there's a reason why we're asking for your
22 input. We want to -- we want to understand that.

23 That said, I think we can open it up for
24 comments. I know there was a sign-in sheet. I
25 don't know if anybody...

1 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yeah, I'll grab it.

2 MS. SUZANNE STEINHAUER: I think we can
3 just open it up.

4 So if you can raise, by a show of hands,
5 any comments or questions that you want to make sure
6 we know about, get in the record.

7 I want to respect people's time, but I
8 want to make sure there's an opportunity.

9 So questions? Going once.

10 I can turn around if somebody wants to
11 raise their hand.

12 Questions? Going twice.

13 We'll be -- I just want to reiterate
14 we'll be around, but that won't be part of the
15 record, so you don't want me trying to relate
16 what -- the conversations that I had with you which
17 inform me, but we want to make sure the
18 Commissioners are aware of them.

19 So going... Three times.

20 I don't see any hands, so I want to thank
21 you for your time. I'll just reiterate that
22 written -- the deadline for written comments is
23 December 18th at 4:30.

24 My contact information is in the slide
25 deck. Both Craig and I have cards, so please take

1 those and feel free to give us a call if you have
2 questions. If they're detailed, we may encourage
3 you to write them down and -- and get them to us.
4 And we did -- we will work with you on that.

5 That said, I think we can conclude the
6 meeting.

7 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yeah.

8 MS. SUZANNE STEINHAUER: We're good?

9 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yeah. Thank you.

10 MR. MARK STROHFUS: Thank you, everyone.

11 MS. SUZANNE STEINHAUER: Thank you for
12 your time.

13 (Public comment concluded.)

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