



September 24, 2024

—Via Electronic Filing—

Will Seuffert
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: INITIAL COMMENTS

COMMUNITY SOLAR GARDEN PROGRAM

DOCKET NO. E002/M-13-867

Dear Mr. Seuffert:

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, submits the attached Initial Comments pursuant to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's (Commission) August 23, 2024 Notice of Comment Period regarding the Company's ARR Compliance Filing submitted on July 31, 2024.

We have electronically filed this document with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and copies have been served on the parties on the attached service list. Please contact Lynnette Sweet at <a href="mailto:lynnette.m.sweet@xcelenergy.com">lynnette.m.sweet@xcelenergy.com</a> or me at <a href="mailto:nick.paluck@xceleneryg.com">nick.paluck@xceleneryg.com</a> if you have any questions regarding this filing.

Sincerely,

/s/

NICK PALUCK MANAGER, REGULATORY ANALYSIS

Enclosures cc: Service List

# STATE OF MINNESOTA BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Katie J. Sieben	Chair
Hwikwon Ham	Commissioner
Valerie Means	Commissioner
Joseph K. Sullivan	Commissioner
John A. Tuma	Commissioner

IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF NORTHERN STATES POWER CO. D/B/A XCEL ENERGY FOR APPROVAL OF ITS PROPOSED COMMUNITY SOLAR GARDEN PROGRAM DOCKET NO. E002/M-13-867

**INITIAL COMMENTS** 

### INTRODUCTION

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, submits these Initial Comments pursuant to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's (Commission) August 23, 2024 Notice of Comment Period regarding the Company's ARR Compliance Filing submitted on July 31, 2024.

### COMMENTS

The Commission's August 23 Notice identified the issue for comments as: "Was Xcel Energy's ARR Compliance filing on July 31, 2024 properly filed by the process established in the July 22, 2022 Commission order." The Notice included specific topics open for Comment which the Company addresses below.

### I. ALIGNMENT WITH JUNE 22, 2022 ORDER

The first issue identified in the Notice is: "Does Xcel Energy's February 1, 2024 compliance filing and subsequent July 31, 2024 compliance filing align with the requirements of the Commission's July 22, 2022 Order?"

The July 22, 2022 Order required the use of the 30-day negative checkoff process for implementing the revised ARR rates. The Company acknowledges that its compliance filing did not align with this order. This was not intentional. The February 1, 2024 filing showed the Company's understanding that the prior approach to updating the ARR rate, in use for approximately ten years, would apply here. Under this process,

the Executive Secretary would issue a Notice to approve the rates before the Company would file a compliance tariff with the revised rates. The Company would only apply the revised rates after they were in the revised compliance tariff filed with the Commission. Following this prior approach for updating the ARR rate was an error made by the Company. After Cooperative Energy Futures (CEF) on July 29, 2024 pointed out to the Company the specific provisions of the July 22, 2022 Order, the Company promptly filed its July 31, 2024 compliance filing with the revised ARR rates.

### II. ADJUSTING THE EFFECTIVE DATE

The second issue identified in the Notice is: "Should the Commission require Xcel Energy to adjust the effective date to the originally filed April 1, 2024 date as requested by the letter submitted by Cooperative Energy Futures?"

For practical and legal reasons discussed below, the Company opposes this specific requirement. The Company, however, presents an alternative means to rectify the issue noted above.

First, adjusting the effective date of the credit presents considerable practical problems for the Company and result in needless delays. The Company has analyzed what it would take to retroactively apply the revised ARR rates back to April 1, 2024, as requested by CEF. There are approximately 28,000 subscribers, and for the four months of retroactive rates being sought here (production for April, May, June and July 2024), this would include retroactive rates for approximately 112,000 invoices. We show in the table below the differences in the bill credit rates between the revised rates in compliance and the prior bill credit rates. We note that while for the residential subscriber class the revised bill credit rates are higher than the prior rates, for the Small General Service and General Service classes the revised bill credit rates are lower than the prior rates. We are uncertain if CEF is proposing that the revised rates be applied to all subscribers – regardless of whether the revised bill credit rates are higher or lower than the prior rates.

Table 1: Difference in Bill Credit Rates 2023 vs. 2024

Customer Class	Bill Credit Type	Bill Credit Rate per kWh (AC) for Energy Delivered to
		Company
	Standard	\$ <del>0.15252</del> <u>0.15789</u>
Residential Service	Enhanced – Solar Gardens > 250 KW (AC)	\$0.17252 <u>0.17789</u>
	Enhanced – Solar Gardens ≤ 250 KW (AC)	\$0.182520.18789
	Standard	\$0.15969 <u>0.15650</u>
Small General Service	Enhanced – Solar Gardens > 250 KW (AC)	\$ <del>0.17969</del> 0.17650
	Enhanced – Solar Gardens ≤ 250 KW (AC)	\$0.18969 <u>0.18650</u>
	Standard	\$0.131860.13170
General Service	Enhanced – Solar Gardens > 250 KW (AC)	\$0.15186 <u>0.15170</u>
	Enhanced – Solar Gardens ≤ 250 KW (AC)	\$0.161860.16170

Retroactively adjusting rates would require the Company to manually re-bill all the effected subscribers. With the understanding that about 112,000 invoices are at issue, to retroactively apply rates the Company estimates that this would take about three to six months (about 1500 person hours) from the time that we would start the project. Outside resources would need to be retained and upskilled to handle this, adding to the cost. The Company does not view this as a practical alternative.

Second, adjusting the effective date of already charged rates would result in retroactive rates that present legal problems. Under state statute, "Utilities are required to file schedules with the commission 'showing all rates, tolls, tariffs and charges which it has established \*\*\*.' Minn. Stat. § 216B.05, subd. 1.... Filings made with the commission by utilities 'continue in force until amended by the public utility or until changed by the commission \*\*\*.' Minn. Stat. § 216B.09, subd. 3...." A filed tariff is "an inherent part of the lawful rate changed to consumers." As stated by the Minnesota Supreme Court, "Ratemaking is a quasi-legislative function [(citation omitted)], and legislation operates prospectively. Indeed, the Public Utility Act expressly prohibits retroactive ratemaking. Minn. Stat. §216B.23, subd 1 ... provides: '[T]he commission shall \*\*\* by order fix reasonable rates \*\*\* to be imposed, observed and followed in the future.' (Emphasis added.)" Peoples Natural Gas v. Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, 369 N.W.2d 530, 533 (Minn. 1985). In applying the doctrine against retroactive ratemaking, the Commission has stated that it "... must require the Company to apply the rate in effect at the time of service. ... In order for the system of filed tariffs to be effective, the public must be able to look to the rate on file at the time service is rendered."2

<sup>1</sup> Northern States Power Company v. City of Oakdale, 588 N.W.2d 534, 537-538 (Minn. App. 1999), citing, Computer Tool & Eng'g, Inc., v. Northern States Power Co., 453 N.W.2d 569, 573 (Minn. App. 1990).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In the Matter of the Request of Otter Tail Power Company to Forgive the Demand Charge and Ratchet Clause for Lakehead Pipeline Cass Lake Public Station for April 1995, Docket No. E017/M-05-321, at page 2. (Emphasis in original).

The Commission, being established by statute, has only those powers given to it by the legislature. Great Northern Railway Co. v. Public Service Commission, 284 Minn. 217, 220, 169 NW2d 732, 735 (1969). "Although the statutes involved here are replete with references to words 'fair,' 'just,' and 'reasonable,' nothing in the statutory scheme suggests that the Commission may act as a court of equity...." In the Matter of New Ulm Telecom, 399 NW2d 111, 122 (Mn. Ct. App. 1987). Any "equitable powers" of the Commission must be found in the context of its statutory authority. Senior Citizens Coalition v. Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, 355 NW2d 295, 305 (Minn. 1984). In the words of the Commission, "The statute itself does not give the Commission the general power of an equity court." (September 1984 Appellate Brief of the Commission in the New Ulm appeal referenced above, at p. 13, accessible on edockets under Docket No. 84-334). "The Commission remains a creature of statute. It presides over an ongoing, intricate regulatory process with duties prescribed by the legislature in considerable detail and where the legislature has generally required the agency to act prospectively." Peoples Natural Gas v. Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, 369 NW2d 530535-536 (Minn. 1985). As explained by the Minnesota Supreme Court, "Historically, we have been reluctant to find implied statutory authority in the context of the MPUC's remedial power. As a general rule, we resolve any doubt about the existence of an agency's authority against the exercise of such authority." In re Owest's Wholesale Service Quality Standards, 702 N.W.2d 246 at 259 (Minn. 2005).

The only power of the Commission to issue a refund is as specified in Minn. Stat. § 216B.23 which states in part as follows:

### 216B.23 LAWFUL RATE; REASONABLE SERVICE.

Subdivision 1. **Determination as to rate; order.** Whenever upon an investigation made under the provisions of Laws 1974, chapter 429, the commission shall find rates, tolls, charges, schedules or joint rates to be unjust, unreasonable, insufficient, or unjustly discriminatory or preferential or otherwise unreasonable or unlawful, the commission shall determine and by order fix reasonable rates, tolls, charges, schedules, or joint rates to be imposed, observed, and followed in the future in lieu of those found to be unreasonable or unlawful.

Subd. 1a. Authority to issue refund. (a) On determining that a public utility has charged a rate in violation of this chapter, a commission rule, or a commission order, the commission, after conducting a proceeding, may require the public utility to refund to its customers, in a manner approved by the commission, any revenues the commission finds were collected as a result of the unlawful conduct. Any refund authorized by this section is permitted in addition to any remedies authorized by section 216B.16 or any other law governing rates. Exercising authority under this section does not preclude the commission from

pursuing penalties under sections 216B.57 to 216B.61 for the same conduct.

- (b) This section must not be construed as allowing:
- (1) retroactive ratemaking;
- (2) refunds based on claims that prior or current approved rates have been unjust, unreasonable, unreasonably preferential, discriminatory, insufficient, inequitable, or inconsistent in application to a class of customers; or
- (3) refunds based on claims that approved rates have not encouraged energy conservation or renewable energy use, or have not furthered the goals of section 216B.164, 216B.241, or 216C.05.
- (c) A refund under this subdivision does not apply to revenues collected more than six years before the date of the notice of the commission proceeding required under this subdivision.

Subd. 2. Finding as to service; order. Whenever the commission shall find any regulations, measurements, practices, acts, or service to be unjust, unreasonable, insufficient, preferential, unjustly discriminatory, or otherwise unreasonable or unlawful, or shall find that any service which can be reasonably demanded cannot be obtained, the commission shall determine and by order fix reasonable measurements, regulations, acts, practices, or service to be furnished, imposed, observed and followed in the future in lieu of those found to be unreasonable, inadequate, or otherwise unlawful, and shall make any other order respecting the measurement, regulation, act, practice, or service as shall be just and reasonable.

As shown by the provisions of this statute, where an improper rate has been set in the tariff, the Commission can set a new rate to be applied in the future. The Commission only has the authority to issue a refund where a utility "has charged a rate" and for "any revenues" that were collected. The bill credits at issue here do not amount to a charged rate and also do not constitute revenues. The bill credits reduce the amount of a subscriber's bill and the Company does not earn revenues based on the amount of the bill credits. Where bill credits are provided, the true-up is in the fuel clause where all bill credits are recovered. This has no net impact on the Company's revenues.

Despite this limitation, the statute does provide for charging a rate to be applied in the future where an incorrect rate has been in the Company's tariff. Along these lines, the Company proposes to adjust the bill credit rate to subscribers of Legacy CSGs to effectively make-up on a class basis<sup>3</sup> for the previously incorrect tariffed bill credit

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Some subscribers in 2024 might not be subscribers from April to July 2025, so these types of subscribers will not get the modification of the bill credit rate that we are proposing. However, on an overall basis, the subscriber class will get the impact of the changes to the bill credit rate.

rate. This solution would adjust future bill credits to provide an offset for the previous error for each subscriber class. The Company proposes that this adjustment apply to the bill credit that would otherwise be in place for production in April, May, June and July 2025. These months align with the same months in 2024 where the incorrect bill credit rate was tariffed and applied, so that there would generally be expected alignment with the amount of generation based on the angle of the sun and hours of sunlight would be expected to be roughly the same. Also, this timing allows the Commission time to consider this matter, issue its order, and time for the Company to file compliance tariffs and have the revised billing loaded in its billing systems.

For residential subscribers, we propose that an *adder* to the bill credit in the amount of \$0.00537 / kWh be applied for the months of April-July 2025, reflecting the difference in value from the prior ARR rate and current ARR rate for this class of subscribers. For Small General Service subscribers, we propose a *subtractor* to the bill credit in the amount of \$0.00319 / kWh be applied for the months of April-July 2025. For General Service subscribers we propose a *subtractor* to the bill credit in the amount of \$0.00016 / kWh be applied for the months of April-July 2025. We also note that April 1, 2025 also coincides with the beginning date when the ARR transitions to the VOS. The Company attaches proposed tariffs as Attachment A that align with its recommended approach.

### III. OTHER ISSUES OR CONCERNS

The Company has addressed pertinent issues above.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Company recommends that the Commission adopt the approach suggested by the Company above and approve the proposed tariffs which are attached.

Dated: September 24, 2024

Northern States Power Company

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#### MINNESOTA ELECTRIC RATE BOOK - MPUC NO. 2

### SOLAR\*REWARDS COMMUNITY PROGRAM (Continued)

Section No. 9

Original 1st Revision Sheet No. 64.1b

to the Building Subscription Model changes, then the garden operator shall promptly change the identification in the Company's systems as to whether the Subscription is subject to the Building Subscription Model. In situations where the garden operator has identified that the Subscription is not subject to the Building Subscription Model, but it in fact is subject to the Building Subscription Model, then the Company may collect from the garden operator all improperly applied residential adders associated with the Subscription for a period going back to one year from the date that the Company provides notice to the garden operator that the residential adder should not have been applied. Payment from the garden operator to the Company shall be made within 30 days of demand. Any failure to timely make this payment shall be considered as a breach of the Standard Contract for Solar\*Rewards Community. The garden operator shall follow the Dispute Resolution provisions of the Standard Contract for Solar\*Rewards Community for any dispute about this.

For those applications that previously qualified for, but no longer qualify for, for the applicable retail rate, the following adders apply to the 2017 VOS Vintage Year Bill Credit Rate table:

- a. A \$0.01/kWh adder to the VOS applies for production from April 1, 2025 to January 1, 2026 for subscriptions held by the large general service class; and
- b. A \$0.03/kWh adder to the VOS applies for production from and after April 1, 2025 for subscriptions held by the residential and small general service classes.

For those applications that previously qualified for, but no longer qualify for, the applicable retail rate, the following adders or subtractors will also apply to the Bill Credit Rate for production from April 1, 2025 through July 31, 2025:

- a. For Residential subscribers, a \$0.00537/kWh adder applies.
- b. For Small General Service subscribers, a \$0.00319/kWh subtractor applies.
- c. For General Service subscribers, a \$0.00016/kWh subtractor applies.

(Continued on Sheet No. 9-64.101)

Date Filed: 09-25-2309-24-24 By: Ryan J. Long Effective Date: 04-01-25

President, Northern States Power Company, a Minnesota corporation

Docket No. E002/M-13-867 Order Date: 05-30-24

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#### MINNESOTA ELECTRIC RATE BOOK - MPUC NO. 2

### SOLAR\*REWARDS COMMUNITY PROGRAM (Continued)

Section No. 9
1st Revision Sheet No. 64.1b

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(Continued on Sheet No. 9-64.101)

Date Filed: 09-24-24 By: Ryan J. Long Effective Date:

President, Northern States Power Company, a Minnesota corporation

Docket No. E002/M-13-867 Order Date:

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### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Joshua DePauw, hereby certify that I have this day served copies of the foregoing document on the attached list of persons.

- <u>xx</u> by depositing a true and correct copy thereof, properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States mail at Minneapolis, Minnesota
- xx electronic filing

Docket No. E002/M-13-867

Dated this 24th day of September 2024

/s/

Joshua DePauw Regulatory Administrator

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Ross	Abbey	ross.abbey@us-solar.com	United States Solar Corp.	100 North 6th St Ste 222C  Minneapolis, MN 55403	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Daniel	Abelson	daniel.abelson@metc.state .mn.us	Metropolitan Council	390 Robert Street N. St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Michael	Allen	michael.allen@allenergysol ar.com	All Energy Solar	721 W 26th st Suite 211  Minneapolis, MN 55405	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
David	Amster Olzweski	david@mysunshare.com	SunShare, LLC	1151 Bannock St  Denver, CO 80204-8020	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
David	Assaf	daassaf@flaherty- hood.com	Flaherty & Hood, P.A.	525 Park Street Suite 470 St. Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Andrew	Ball	aball@keyesfox.com	Keyes & Fox LLP	1580 Lincoln Street Suite 880 Denver, CO 80203	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Mike	Bauer	Mbauer@ci.rogers.mn.us	City of Rogers	22350 South Diamond Lake Rd. Rogers, MN 55374	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Laura	Beaton	beaton@smwlaw.com	Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP	396 Hayes Street  San Francisco, CA 94102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Ingrid	Bjorklund	ingrid@bjorklundlaw.com	Bjorklund Law, PLLC	855 Village Center Drive #256 North Oaks, MN 55127	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Ingrid	Bjorklund	ibjorklund@avisenlegal.co m	Avisen Legal	901 S. Marquette Ave. #1675 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Kenneth	Bradley	kbradley1965@gmail.com		2837 Emerson Ave S Apt CW112	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
				Minneapolis, MN 55408			
essica	Burdette	jessica.burdette@state.mn. us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place East Suite 500 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Gabriel	Chan	gabechan@umn.edu	University of Minnesota	130 Hubert H. Humphrey Center 301 19th Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55455	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
City	Clerk	gregg.engdahl@ci.stcloud. mn.us	City of St. Cloud	400 Second St. S St. Cloud, MN 56301	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Generic Notice	Commerce Attorneys	commerce.attorneys@ag.st ate.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-DOC	445 Minnesota Street Suite 1400 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
<b>Sevin</b>	Cray	kevin@communitysolaracc ess.org	CCSA	1644 Platte St  Denver, CO 80202	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
George	Damian	gdamian@cleanenergyeco nomymn.org	Clean Energy Economy MN	13713 Washburn Ave S  Burnsville, MN 55337	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Fimothy	DenHerder Thomas	timothy@cooperativeenerg yfutures.com	Cooperative Energy Futures	3500 Bloomington Ave. S  Minneapolis, MN 55407	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
ames	Denniston	james.r.denniston@xcelen ergy.com	Xcel Energy Services, Inc.	414 Nicollet Mall, 401-8  Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
lan M.	Dobson	ian.m.dobson@xcelenergy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall, 401-8  Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Scott F	Dunbar	sdunbar@keyesfox.com	Keyes & Fox LLP	1580 Lincoln St Ste 880  Denver, CO 80203	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Hannah	Dunn	hannah.dunn@oakdalemn. gov	City of Oakdale	1584 Hadley Ave N  Oakdale, MN 55104	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Brian	Edstrom	briane@cubminnesota.org	Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota	332 Minnesota St Ste W1360 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Dick	Edwards	dedwards@ci.maple- grove.mn.us	City of Maple Grove	12800 Arbor Lakes Parkway P O Box 1180 Maple Grove, MN 553116180	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Betsy	Engelking	betsy@nationalgridrenewa bles.com	National Grid Renewables	8400 Normandale Lake Blvd Ste 1200 Bloomington, MN 55437	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
John	Farrell	jfarrell@ilsr.org	Institute for Local Self-Reliance	2720 E. 22nd St Institute for Local Self Reliance Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Sharon	Ferguson	sharon.ferguson@state.mn .us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place E Ste 280  Saint Paul, MN 551012198	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Nathan	Franzen	nathan@nationalgridrenew ables.com	Geronimo Energy, LLC	8400 Normandale Lake Blvd Ste 1200 Bloomington, MN 55437	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Hal	Galvin	halgalvin@comcast.net	Provectus Energy Development IIc	1936 Kenwood Parkway  Minneapolis,  MN  55405	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Allen	Gleckner	gleckner@fresh-energy.org	Fresh Energy	408 St. Peter Street Ste 350 Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jenny	Glumack	jenny@mrea.org	Minnesota Rural Electric Association	11640 73rd Ave N Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Sean	Gosiewski	sean@afors.org	Alliance for Sustainability	2801 21st Ave S Ste 100  Minneapolis, MN 55407	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Scott	Greenbert	scott@nautilussolar.com	Nautilus Solar Energy, LLC	396 Springfield Aver, Ste 2 Summit, NJ 07901	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Kim	Havey	kim.havey@minneapolismn .gov	City of Minneapolis	350 South 5th Street, Suite 315M Minneapolis, MN 55415	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jan	Hubbard	jan.hubbard@comcast.net		7730 Mississippi Lane Brooklyn Park, MN 55444	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Reuben	Hunter	bhunter@madisonei.com	Madison Energy Investments	8100 Boone Blvd Suite 430 Vienna, VA 22182	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
John S.	Jaffray	jjaffray@jjrpower.com	JJR Power	350 Highway 7 Suite 236  Excelsior, MN 55331	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Sarah	Johnson Phillips	sarah.phillips@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth Street Suite 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Julie	Jorgensen	juliejorgensen62@gmail.co m	Greenmark Solar	4630 Quebec Ave N New Hope, MN 55428-4973	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Ralph	Kaehler	Ralph.Kaehler@gmail.com		13700 Co. Rd. 9 Eyota, MN 55934	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
Cliff	Kaehler	cliff.kaehler@novelenergy. biz	Novel Energy Solutions LLC	4710 Blaylock Way  Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
Michael	Kampmeyer	mkampmeyer@a-e- group.com	AEG Group, LLC	260 Salem Church Road  Sunfish Lake, MN 55118	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
William D	Kenworthy	will@votesolar.org	Vote Solar	1 South Dearborn St Ste 2000 Chicago, IL 60603	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Samuel B.	Ketchum	sketchum@kennedy- graven.com	Kennedy & Graven, Chartered	150 S 5th St Ste 700 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
Bobby	King	bking@solarunitedneighors .org	Solar United Neighbors	3140 43rd Ave S  Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
Brad	Klein	bklein@elpc.org	Environmental Law & Policy Center	35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1600 Suite 1600 Chicago, IL 60601	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia
Aaron	Knoll	aknoll@greeneespel.com	Greene Espel PLLP	222 South Ninth Street Suite 2200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Officia

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Michael	Krause	michaelkrause61@yahoo.c om	Kandiyo Consulting, LLC	1200 Plymouth Avenue Minneapolis, MN 55411	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Dean	Leischow	dean@sunrisenrg.com	Sunrise Energy Ventures	315 Manitoba Ave Ste 200 Wayzata, MN 55391	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Annie	Levenson Falk	annielf@cubminnesota.org	Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota	332 Minnesota Street, Suite W1360 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Alice	Madden	alice@communitypowermn.	Community Power	2720 E 22nd St  Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Gregg	Mast	gmast@cleanenergyecono mymn.org	Clean Energy Economy Minnesota	4808 10th Avenue S  Minneapolis, MN 55417	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jason	Maur	jason.maur@renesolapowe r.com	Renesola Power Holdings, LLC	850 Canal Street 3rd Floor Stamford, CT 06902	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Matthew	Melewski	matthew@nokomisenergy.	Nokomis Energy LLC & Ole Solar LLC	2639 Nicollet Ave Ste 200  Minneapolis, MN 55408	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Thomas	Melone	Thomas.Melone@AllcoUS.	Minnesota Go Solar LLC	222 South 9th Street Suite 1600 Minneapolis, MN 55120	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Michael	Menzel	mike.m@sagiliti.com	Sagiliti	23505 Smithtown Rd. Suite 280 Excelsior, MN 55331	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Brian	Millberg	fwengineering@comcast.n et		695 Grand AVe #222 Saint Paul, MN 55105	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Marc	Miller	mmiller@soltage.com	Soltage, LLC	66 York Street, 5th Floor  Jersey City, NJ 07302	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Marcus	Mills	Marcus@communitypower mn.org	Community Power	2720 E 22nd St  Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Andrew	Moratzka	andrew.moratzka@stoel.co m	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth St Ste 4200  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Pouya	Najmaie	pouya@cooperativeenergyf utures.com	Cooperative Energy Futures	3416 16th Ave S  Minneapolis, MN 55407	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Darin	Nelson	dnelson@minnetonkamn.g ov	City of Minnetonka	14600 Minnetonka Blvd  Minnetonka,  MN  55345	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Rolf	Nordstrom	rnordstrom@gpisd.net	Great Plains Institute	2801 21ST AVE S STE 220  Minneapolis, MN 55407-1229	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Logan	O'Grady	logrady@mnseia.org	Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association	2288 University Ave W St. Paul, MN 55114	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Patty	O'Keefe	patty.okeefe@sierraclub.or g		2525 Emerson Ave S Apt 2  Minneapolis, MN 55405	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jeff	O'Neill	jeff.oneill@ci.monticello.mn .us	City of Monticello	505 Walnut Street Suite 1 Monticelllo, MN 55362	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Carol A.	Overland	overland@legalectric.org	Legalectric - Overland Law Office	1110 West Avenue  Red Wing,  MN  55066	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Eric	Pasi	ericp@ips-solar.com	IPS Solar	2670 Patton Rd  Roseville, MN 55113	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Dan	Patry	dpatry@sunedison.com	SunEdison	600 Clipper Drive  Belmont, CA 94002	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jeffrey C	Paulson	jeff.jcplaw@comcast.net	Paulson Law Office, Ltd.	4445 W 77th Street Suite 224 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Morgan	Pitz	morgan.pitz@us-solar.com	US Solar	100 N 6th St #410B Minneapolis, MN 55403	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Kristel	Porter	kristel@mnrenewablenow.o	MN Renewable Now	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Paula	Prahl	paula.prahl@dominiuminc. com	Dominium	2905 Northwest Blvd Ste 150 Plymouth, MN 55441	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Bridget	Rathsack	bridget.rathsack@burnsvill emn.gov	City of Burnsville, MN	100 Civic Center Parkway  Burnsville,  MN  55337	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Generic Notice	Residential Utilities Division	residential.utilities@ag.stat e.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012131	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Micah	Revell	micah.revell@stinson.com	Stinson LLP	50 South Sixth St Ste 2600  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Jonathan	Roberts	jroberts@soltage.com	Soltage	66 York St 5th Floor Jersey City, NJ 07302	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Delaney	Russell	delaney@mnipl.org	Just Solar Coalition	4407 E Lake Street  Minneapolis, MN 55407	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
lan	SantosMeeker	ians@ips-solar.com	IPS Solar	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Joseph L	Sathe	jsathe@kennedy- graven.com	Kennedy & Graven, Chartered	150 S 5th St Ste 700  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Christine	Schwartz	Regulatory.records@xcele nergy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall FL 7  Minneapolis, MN 554011993	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Will	Seuffert	Will.Seuffert@state.mn.us	Public Utilities Commission	121 7th PI E Ste 350 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
David	Shaffer	david.shaffer@novelenergy .biz	Novel Energy Solutions	2303 Wycliff St Ste 300 St. Paul, MN 55114	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Christopher L.	Sherman	csherman@sherman- associates.com	Solar Holdings LLC	233 Park Ave S Ste 201  Minneapolis, MN 55415	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Doug	Shoemaker	dougs@charter.net	Minnesota Renewable Energy	2928 5th Ave S  Minneapolis, MN 55408	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Karl	Sonneman	karl17@hbci.com	Law Office of Karl W. Sonneman	111 Riverfront Suite 202 Winona, MN 55987	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Russ	Stark	Russ.Stark@ci.stpaul.mn.u s	City of St. Paul	Mayor's Office 15 W. Kellogg Blvd., 390 Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service Suite	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Eric	Swanson	eswanson@winthrop.com	Winthrop & Weinstine	225 S 6th St Ste 3500 Capella Tower Minneapolis, MN 554024629	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Whitney	Terrill	whitney@mnipl.org	Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Anna	Tobin	atobin@greeneespel.com	Greene Espel PLLP	222 South Ninth Street Suite 2200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Zack	Townsend	zachary.townsend@brookfi eldrenewable.com	Brookfield Renewable	200 Liberty St FL 14  New York, NY 10281	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Pat	Treseler	pat.jcplaw@comcast.net	Paulson Law Office LTD	4445 W 77th Street Suite 224 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Gary	Van Winkle	gvanwinkle@mylegalaid.or g	Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	111 N Fifth St Ste 100  Minneapolis, MN 55403	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
John	Vaughn	Nik@rreal.org	Rural Renewable Energy Alliance	3963 8th Street SW  Backus, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Robert J.V.	Vose	rvose@kennedy- graven.com	Kennedy & Graven, Chartered	150 S 5th St Ste 700  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Kevin	Walker	KWalker@beaconinterfaith.	Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Jenna	Warmuth	jwarmuth@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St  Duluth, MN 55802-2093	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official

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Jessica	Welk	jwelk@sherman- associates.com	Sherman Associates	233 Park Avenue South Suite 201 Minneapolis, MN 55415	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Skip	Wieser	swieser@wieserlaw.com	Wieser Law Office, P.C.	33 South Walnut Street Suite 200 La Crescent, MN 55947	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Heidi	Winter	hwinter@co.murray.mn.us	Murray County	2500 28th Street PO Box 57 Slayton, MN 56172	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Curtis P	Zaun	curtis@cpzlaw.com	Attorney At Law	3254 Rice Street  Little Canada, MN 55126	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official
Emily	Ziring	eziring@stlouispark.org	City of St. Louis Park	5005 Minnetonka Blvd St. Louis Park, MN 55416	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_13-867_Official