



MINNEAPOLIS
CITY OF LAKES

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November 6, 2017

Daniel P. Wolfe, Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Pl E #350
St Paul, MN 55101

Re: In the Matter of Xcel Energy's Renewable Development Fund (RDF) Annual Report, Tracker Account True-up, and Request for 2018 Rider Factor, PUC Docket Number: E-002/ M-17-712

Dear Mr. Wolfe,

I represent the Minneapolis City Council ward where the Mississippi River passes through downtown, including St. Anthony Falls and the Upper Lock where Crown Hydro proposes to locate its project. Crown Hydro received a grant from the Renewable Development Fund 16 years ago. The project has long been opposed by the City, and the City has repeatedly commented on this project raising concerns about its compatibility with plans for the area. In the years since the grant was awarded, the Minneapolis central riverfront has undergone dramatic change and the St. Anthony Falls have become the vibrant centerpiece of a revitalized riverfront. I urge the Commission to review and terminate the grant contract because the project is incompatible with plans to repurpose the lock and dam facility as a world-class visitor and interpretive center.

According to the criteria defined in the 2017 RDF legislation, Laws 2017, Ch. 94, Article 10, Sec. 29, this extremely old project that has made no progress should be terminated. This project fails all parts of the test in the above law—it has not obtained a site (in fact it has been turned down three times for sites), it has received none of the needed permits, and it has not started construction. I request the Commission take a hard look at the Crown project and that it advise Xcel that the grant should be terminated.

This is especially concerning in light of the project context. The St. Anthony Falls area, which I represent, has become the vibrant centerpiece of a revitalized riverfront. Whole new communities of constituents, notably the North Loop and East Town, have grown up around the river downtown, representing billions of dollars of investment. The St Anthony Falls Upper Lock itself is identified as the preferred site of a world-class visitor and interpretive center in multiple adopted plans and initiatives for the area – by the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Meet Minneapolis, and the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board. Crown Hydro is now pursuing a license amendment and seeking to site their hydroelectric facility at the St. Anthony Falls Upper Lock, which would severely impede efforts by a broad-based coalition of stakeholders to repurpose the lock and dam in line with the community's adopted plans and policies.

In 2014, just in advance of the St. Anthony Falls Upper Lock being closed to commercial navigation, the lock was highlighted in the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Master Plan, which states that the Park Board should “collaborate with partner agencies to create a visitor's center on the lock and dam structure.”



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In the Meet Minneapolis tourism master plan, Destination Transformation 2030, the site was identified as the site for Goal 3, to “build an iconic visitors center on downtown’s Central Riverfront,” with the express purpose to “activate the Mississippi River as the heart of Minneapolis’ tourism experience” and “use public and private investment to integrate the riverfront into the city.”

And the Minneapolis Downtown Council, in Goal 7 of its Intersections: Downtown 2025 plan, identifies the riverfront as the focal point for creating a “world class destination” for the city, calling for a “central gathering point to orient a visitor and [be] the key attraction at the water’s edge.” The plan recognizes the iconic Stone Arch Bridge (which abuts the lock) as having a major impact on visitation, with over 2.5 million visitors last year. It also identifies St. Anthony Falls as our singular natural wonder – the only waterfall on the Mississippi River, which is one of the great rivers of the world. The 2025 plan envisions our Minneapolis waterfront experience rising to the stature of “Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, Seattle’s Pike Place Market, San Antonio’s Riverwalk or San Francisco’s Embarcadero.”

Each of these plans was the product of meaningful community engagement, and represents the vision of my constituents: citizens, riverfront organizations, the business community, and the tourism industry.

When the grant was awarded 16 years ago, the Crown proposal was already out of sync with our community’s vision for the redevelopment of the Riverfront. Its failure to make progress on site approval and permitting is hardly surprising given the conflict it has with the uses occurring and planned. It is incumbent on the PUC, given this legislation, to give this project its full and serious attention and to call for grant termination to allow a reallocation of these RDF monies to a more appropriate use. That was the intent of the law and should be the Commission’s instruction to Xcel.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

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