

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Office of Administrative Hearings Docket No.:  
21-2500-37959

Public Utility Commission Docket Nos.:  
E-002/TL-21-189 (Route Permit for West 345 kV Transmission Line)  
E-002/TL-21-190 (Route Permit for East 345 kV Transmission Line)  
E-002/GS-21-191 (Site Permit)

*In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy for a Site Permit and  
Two Route Permits for the up to 460 Megawatt Sherco Solar Energy  
Generating System and Associated 345 Kilovolt Transmission Lines  
in Sherburne County, Minnesota*

*In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy for a Site Permit for  
the up to 460 MW Sherco Solar Project in Sherburne County.*

*In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy for a Route Permit for  
the East 345 kV Transmission Line for the Sherco Solar Project in  
Sherburne County.*

*In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy for a Route Permit for  
the West 345 kV Transmission Line for the Sherco Solar Project in  
Sherburne County.*

THE CITY OF BECKER  
PREFILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF  
CITY ADMINISTRATOR  
JEFF O'NEILL

April 6, 2022

Summary: The City of Becker had previously narrowly objected to the inclusion of certain parcels abutting the City of Becker's corporate boundary in the Sherco Solar project. Through collaborative discussions with the applicant, Xcel Energy, the City of Becker has been able to resolve its concerns, and now joins Xcel Energy in requesting that Xcel Energy be issued a site permit and two route permits consistent with Site Alternative 1A, as detailed in a joint letter of today's date from Xcel Energy and the City of Becker.

Exhibits: CITY--001 Joint letter from Xcel Energy and City of Becker, April 6, 2022

CITY--002 Schematic depicting new infrastructure to be installed and its relationship to areas included in Sherco Solar footprint

Pre-Filed Direct Testimony  
Of  
Jeff O'Neill

1   **Q.   Please identify yourself.**

2   A.           My name is Jeff O'Neill and I am the City Administrator for the City of Becker. I  
3           am a witness for the City of Becker ("Becker" or the "City").  
4

5   **Q.   What is the purpose of your testimony?**

6   A.           The purpose of my testimony is to support the City's request that the Honorable  
7           Judge Kimberly Middendorf recommend to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) that  
8           the site permit for Sherco Solar be issued for Site Alternative 1A, a modified version of  
9           Site Alternative 1 as evaluated in the Environmental Assessment completed for this  
10          project, and as agreed to by the applicant, Xcel Energy.  
11

12   **Q.   Describe your background in city government.**

13   A.           I graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College with a Bachelor of Arts degree with  
14           Majors in Political Science and Criminal Justice. I earned a Masters Degree in Urban and  
15           Regional Studies from Minnesota State University in Mankato, MN. My experience  
16           includes 42 years in community development and local government in various capacities.

17           From 1980-1985 as Administrative Assistance and Management Analyst for the

1 City of Coon Rapids, MN.

2 From 1986-1987 as City Coordinator for the City of Watertown, MN.

3 From 1988-2006 as Community Development Director/Assistant City  
4 Administrator and 2007-February 2021 City Administrator for the City of Monticello,  
5 MN.

6 From June-October 2021 as Interim City Administrator, City of Watertown, MN.

7 And from January 2022 to the present as Interim City Administrator, City of  
8 Becker, MN.

9 As City Administrator for the City of Monticello from 2007-2021, I represented  
10 Monticello as a member of the Coalition of Utility Cities (CUC) which is a coalition of  
11 cities that serve as host communities to electric power plants. Both Monticello and  
12 Becker are members of this organization. I also served as CUC president for a number of  
13 years.

14  
15 **Q. Are you a local resident?**

16 A. Yes, I am currently and have been a member of the Becker/Big Lake/Monticello  
17 community since 1988. I was also a founding member of the Highway 25 Coalition that  
18 later became the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership (CMRP). The  
19 City of Becker is a member of this organization, which is comprised of three cities, four  
20 townships and two counties. CMRP's mission is to implement a compelling regional

1 vision and framework that guides local decisions on thoughtful and collaborative  
2 planning, growth, and development to benefit both individual jurisdictions and the region  
3 as a whole. The Partnership collaborates on regional planning and economic development  
4 to advance its adopted regional vision.

5  
6 **Q. Referring you to Exhibit CITY--001, it appears the City of Becker has reached an**  
7 **understanding with Xcel Energy that would address the concerns about the Sherco Solar**  
8 **Project that the City had raised in its filings in these dockets. Is that correct?**

9 A. Yes. This exhibit is a joint letter that the City of Becker and Xcel Energy have  
10 agreed to submit which details the resolution of the City's previously expressed concerns  
11 to which Xcel Energy and the City of Becker have agreed. On behalf of the City of  
12 Becker, I am pleased that Xcel Energy has accommodated the City's request that the  
13 most attractive parcels for development in closest proximity to the City's municipal  
14 boundaries as listed in the exhibit, comprising 246.7 acres, be excluded from the Sherco  
15 Solar project. The City of Becker City Council approved this resolution and authorized  
16 Mayor Tracy Bertram and me to sign this letter at its regular meeting on April 5, 2022,  
17 and the City therefore joins Xcel Energy in requesting that Judge Middendorf  
18 recommend, and the PUC approve, the site permit and two route permits in the above-  
19 referenced dockets consistent with the Site Alternative 1A as presented in this joint letter.

1   **Q.     This Exhibit CITY--001 references concerns the City of Becker had previously**  
2   **raised about the Sherco Solar Project in these dockets. For the record, please summarize**  
3   **what these concerns were.**

4   A.           Initially, to be clear, the City of Becker supports utility solar that is situated  
5               properly and well-planned from a wholistic standpoint for the betterment of all and had  
6               been broadly supportive of the Sherco Solar project. However, before we were able to  
7               reach our agreement with Xcel Energy memorialized in Exhibit CITY--001, the City had  
8               raised a very narrow concern with the proposed footprint of the Sherco Solar Project. The  
9               City was concerned that Sherco Solar as proposed encompassed land that could more  
10              productively be devoted to future commercial or industrial development, thereby  
11              generating many jobs for the State of Minnesota, boosting the local economy and creating  
12              much-needed tax base for the City of Becker and other local jurisdictions. The City  
13              therefore requested in previous filings that five parcels of property adjacent to the City of  
14              Becker's municipal boundaries that are particularly well poised for immediate  
15              development representing 246.7 acres, or about six percent of the total area encompassed  
16              by Sherco Solar, be excluded from the project in order to strike a better balance between  
17              the benefits of solar energy generation and the need for economic development. The  
18              removal of these parcels identified by the City was evaluated in both Site Alternatives 1  
19              and 2 in the Environmental Assessment completed for this project.

1   **Q.     Referring you to Exhibit CITY--002, please explain what is depicted.**

2   A.           This is a schematic showing new sanitary sewer and municipal centralized water  
3           infrastructure and associated road improvements that will be installed in the vicinity of  
4           the Becker Business Park as part of a project that received a significant investment from  
5           the state of \$20.5 million in the 2020 bonding bill, which the City has agreed to  
6           supplement with an additional \$786,100 in City funds to satisfy the local match  
7           requirement, bringing the total public investment committed to this project to more than  
8           \$21 million. The sanitary sewer improvements consist of a combination of sanitary  
9           gravity sewer and a sanitary sewer force main, including two new lift stations, and  
10          extending the force main to the wastewater treatment plant, and are depicted by a green  
11          dotted line on this exhibit. The centralized water infrastructure components of the project  
12          consist of constructing two additional wells northeast of the City and extending a  
13          watermain to the current boundary of the City on the west and looping the city water  
14          supply, which is depicted by a blue dotted line on this exhibit. The City's current  
15          corporate boundary is shown in a dark red dashed line. This exhibit also depicts the areas  
16          that Xcel proposes to include in the Sherco Solar project in purple diagonal hatch pattern  
17          on either side of the City and indicates the areas that were originally proposed to be  
18          included in the Sherco Solar project and which the City has requested be excluded from  
19          the project in rusty orange cross-hatching (and which were evaluated for removal in Site  
20          Alternatives 1 and 2 in the Environmental Assessment completed for this project).

1  
2 **Q. How does this Exhibit CITY--002 relate to the concerns the City had previously**  
3 **expressed with the footprint of the Sherco Solar project?**

4 A. The proximity of this infrastructure and the City's existing boundaries to the  
5 Sherco Solar project as proposed, and specifically to the areas within the proposed project  
6 footprint depicted in orange cross hatching on this exhibit, was at the root of the concerns  
7 the City had previously expressed with the Sherco Solar project. The City expects that its  
8 infrastructure installations shown on this exhibit will serve as a catalyst for new  
9 development, and that the areas shown in orange are among the most attractive parcels  
10 for development and can realistically be expected to develop in the near future—certainly  
11 within the anticipated lifespan of the Sherco Solar project. The City's position has been  
12 that including these parcels in the Sherco Solar project to be permitted by the Public  
13 Utilities Commission would be a mistake because the land is better suited for and would  
14 provide greater public benefit from use for commercial or industrial development.  
15

16 **Q. What is the status of this infrastructure project depicted on Exhibit CITY-002?**

17 A. The proposed improvements have been broken down into several phases which  
18 will be completed beginning this year, with all construction on all phases anticipated by  
19 2024.  
20



1   **Q.     Referring back to Exhibit CITY--001, has the City been able to resolve its concerns**  
2   **with the footprint of the Sherco Solar project with Xcel Energy?**

3   A.           Yes. The City appreciates that Xcel Energy worked cooperatively with the City  
4               and has now agreed to the removal of the parcels shown in orange cross-hatching on  
5               Exhibit CITY--002 as part of Site Alternative 1A, as detailed in Exhibit CITY--001.  
6               Should the PUC issue site and route permits to Xcel Energy for the Sherco Solar project  
7               that exclude these parcels, the City would consider its previously-stated concerns with the  
8               Sherco Solar project to have been fully resolved. Therefore, as stated in the joint letter,  
9               the City of Becker now joins Xcel Energy in requesting that Judge Middendorf  
10              recommend, and the Public Utilities Commission approve, a site permit and two route  
11              permits to Xcel Energy as proposed in Site Alternative 1A, as detailed in Exhibit CITY--  
12              001.

13  
14   **Q.     Does this conclude your pre-filed direct testimony?**

15   A.           Yes.  
16