

Comments on Minnesota Power’s Petition for Approval of the Acquisition of Solar Power to Support Economic Relief and Recovery & Inquiry into Utility Investment that May Assist in Minnesota’s Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

PUC Docket Numbers:

Docket No. E015/M-20-828 & Docket No. E, G-999/CI-20-492

LIUNA Minnesota & North Dakota appreciates the opportunity to offer comments on Minnesota Power’s petition for approval of three utility-scale solar projects in Northern Minnesota.

LIUNA Minnesota & North Dakota represent 12,000 unionized construction workers statewide including many in Northern Minnesota. We believe that the proposed solar investments can benefit both our members and the public at large by creating and sustaining high-quality construction and maintenance jobs. We appreciate the commitments and efforts made by Minnesota Power to maximize the project’s local benefits by siting generation within the company’s service territory, prioritizing use of skilled local labor to build it, and efforts to procure regionally-produced solar panels.

The creation of high-quality construction jobs is not the primary objective of energy policy in Minnesota, but it is an important factor to consider, especially in Northern Minnesota - a region particularly hard hit by the COVID 19 economic crisis. These concerns are especially important in light of the widespread unemployment caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Minnesota construction workers are hurting and urgently need good work opportunities. These projects will provide significant direct and indirect benefits both for construction workers and for area communities.

While we are beginning to ramp up vaccine distribution and invest Federal stimulus money, there are still significant questions about how fast and how fully Minnesota’s construction industry will recover. Thankfully, we have a clear roadmap for recovery.

Significant economic investments in our critical infrastructure at both the state and federal level during the last recession led Minnesota to a faster and more robust recovery than Wisconsin.¹ Swift state action paired with smart investments helped minimize the impacts of the last recession, while creating pathways of opportunity for both unemployment construction workers and for new entrants into the industry. We have the opportunity to not only recreate that success, but to fuel a faster recovery through approval of accelerated energy investment by Minnesota utilities, while also working to address ambitious GHG emissions reduction goals.

Energy investments like Minnesota Power’s investment in utility-scale solar is one of the most effective means of spurring job creation and economic recovery from a recessionary period. Scholars studying the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) “found that

¹ Van Wychen, Jeff and Lucas Franco. 2018. “Divergent Recoveries: An Analysis of Construction Industry Employment in Minnesota and Wisconsin.” *North Star Policy Institute*. Available here: <http://northstarpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Divergent-Recoveries-July-2018-Web.pdf>.

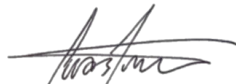
clean energy was the most cost-effective type of spending for job creation.”² Investments in clean energy spurred significant direct, indirect and induced job creation during the Great Recession.³

Minnesota Power’s investment will not only lead to direct construction job creation, but it will help to position Minnesota as a leader in the rapidly growing clean energy economy. MP’s commitment to buy regionally produced solar panels will create good paying manufacturing jobs and help to grow Minnesota’s clean energy manufacturing economy. Additionally, Minnesota Power’s continued decarbonization of their energy portfolio can provide taconite producers a competitive advantage in global markets as demand for low carbon materials grows.

We believe that the commission should both approve Minnesota Power’s request to execute the relevant agreements between the Company and ALLETE Enterprises related to Laskin, Sylvan and Duluth Solar projects and that the Commission should approve MP’s land lease agreements. Additionally, we believe that Minnesota ratepayers are sufficiently protected from risk.

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Respectfully Submitted,
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² Myers, Amanda and Energy Innovation. 2020. “Utilities Are Better Suited To Handle Covid Uncertainties - Why That’s Good News For Clean Energy.” *Forbes*. Available here: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/energyinnovation/2020/07/07/utilities-are-better-suited-to-handle-covid--uncertainties--why-thats-good-news-for-clean-energy/#324430da2ce3>.

³ Pollin, Robert and Heidi Garrett-Peltier. 2011. “The U.S. Employment Effects of Military and Domestic Spending Priorities: 2011.” *Political Economy Research Institute: University of Massachusetts Amherst*. Available here: https://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/PERI_military_spending_2011.pdf.