

CEL Partners with Food Bank of Western Mass to Build New, Energy Efficient Facility

MWEC's NextZero decarbonization and electrification program and Chicopee Electric Light (CEL) are working with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts to implement energy efficiency measures in the organization's new distribution center, which will be built in Chicopee. The organization celebrated the official start of the new project with a groundbreaking ceremony held on June 2.

The groundbreaking ceremony featured remarks from state legislators, local businesspersons, and nonprofit leaders, including the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts Executive Director Andrew Morehouse, congressmen Richard Neal and James McGovern, Chicopee Mayor John Vieau, and CEL General Manager James Lisowski.

The limited storage space at the Food Bank's current distribution center in Hatfield caused the organization to turn away more than one million pounds of food donations over the past three and a half years. Demand for food is expected to increase with inflation and as federal pandemic benefits expire, causing the Food Bank to need a larger space to house its donations. At 63,000 square feet, the new distribution center will be more than double the size of its current 30,000 square foot facility in Hatfield. The location was chosen for a number

of reasons, including being near the highest demand for services, making it easier, less time consuming, and more economical for pantry providers and distributors.

"Chicopee's location as a logistics hub makes it ideal for the Food Bank of Western

Mass to provide more efficient and effective services to those in need," said Vieau. An additional benefit of the site's location is that the Food Bank can take advantage of CEL's low rates and generous rebate programs.

After purchasing the land for the new headquarters on Carew Street in Chicopee, the Food Bank and its contractors reached out to CEL to learn of any rebate or energy efficiency opportunities. The new distribution center is eligible for commercial rebates from CEL. Through the NextZero New



CEL GM James Lisowski presents a ceremonial check

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MMWEC, Center for EcoTechnology Hold Earth Day Webinar

In observation of Earth Week, MMWEC joined the Center for EcoTechnology (CET) to host NextZero webinars for MLP staff and customers. With the continued growth of NextZero offerings, the Earth Week webinars provided an opportunity to educate customers of participating municipal light plants (MLPs) about the many programs and services available through the NextZero energy efficiency and electrification program. A one-hour morning program was offered for MLP staff to provide details on offerings, where to refer customer questions, and make them generally aware of the residential services offered under the NextZero brand. A one-hour noontime program for MLP customers had 24 attendees including representation from at least six MLPs.

The webinars explained the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' decarbonization goals and what steps NextZero customers can take to help the state achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. CET staff emphasized that reaching net-zero carbon emissions will require residents to electrify and reduce their home energy use through transitioning heating to air source heat pump systems, weatherizing their homes, cooking with induction stovetops, and switching to electric vehicles.

CET staff explained the different services and offerings available to participating MLP customers through NextZero. A pivotal first step to increase efficiency in the home is signing up for a no-cost home energy audit. During an audit, CET auditors conduct a

full assessment of the home, and identify improvements that can be made to save money and conserve energy.

Information was provided on the Air Source Heat Pump Assessment Program, which allows customers of participating MLPs to schedule a no-cost, no-obligation assessment with an independent heat pump expert to learn about the technology and whether or not it would be a good fit for their homes. If the customers decide to purchase heat pumps, CET guides them through every step, from reviewing contractor designs to post-installation inspections and rebate applications.

Webinar attendees also learned about the NextZero Connected Homes demand response program, which leverages the technology of smart devices into savings for light departments and their customers. They also learned about the various rebates available to NextZero customers.

"Informing MLP staff and customers about the NextZero programs is critical to the mission to decarbonize our communities, particularly through the learning and development of those who interact with customers every day," said MMWEC Sustainable Energy Policy & Program Senior Manager Bill Bullock.

A more in depth webinar focused on the Connected Homes program and its importance in helping the grid adapt to the clean energy transition is planned for June 21. ∞

Three MMWEC Members honored by the APPA

Three MMWEC Members have been recognized by the American Public Power Association (APPA) for their safety and reliability practices. Sterling Municipal Light Department (SMLD) and Ipswich Electric Light Department (IELD) earned the APPA RP3 designation, and SMLD and Boylston Municipal Light Department (BMLD) were awarded the APPA Safety Award of Excellence.

The APPA Reliable Public Power Provider program recognizes municipal light plants (MLPs) that demonstrate a high proficiency in four key areas: reliability, safety, workforce development, and system improvement. The applications are reviewed by the APPA 18-member panel and given a score. Applications that receive an 80 percent score or higher are awarded the RP3 designation, which lasts three years.

This is the third time SMLD has achieved the RP3 designation, having previously earned it in 2015 and 2018. SMLD General Manager Darren Borge said the key to maintaining the designation is prioritizing all operational areas equally to ensure a well-rounded, successful department.

“Our goal at the SMLD is our continued reliability and dedication to safety for our employees and to the public, while being proactive with advancements in technology and system integration,” Borge said. “The RP3 designation shows that we are committed to bettering ourselves and our department.”

IELD is a two-time recipient of the RP3 designation, having previously earned it for the first time in 2019. IELD Manager Jon Blair said that completing the application process itself was a pivotal learning tool for the department as it helps identify areas of need. As a result of the application process for IELD’s 2019 designation, Blair said the department pivoted to focus on workforce development, including cross-training, professional development, and restructuring the organization to be more resilient. This year’s application process also impacted the department’s operational goals.

“Looking ahead, we are integrating an asset/work

management platform that will enable us to approach improvement in a more strategic way; highlighting the anticipated improvements resulting from this initiative,” Blair said. “IELD customers can have confidence that we are committed to upholding best-industry practices across all facets of our organization.”

Both IELD and SMLD plan to reapply for RP3 in 2025.

The APPA Safety Awards of Excellence recognizes MLPs with the lowest number of safety incidents within their rate groups, as determined by worker-hours of exposure.

SMLD ranked first in Group B, which equates to 15,000 to 29,999 worker-hours of exposure. Borge said the COVID-19 pandemic caused SMLD to adjust certain safety procedures, such as splitting workers into separate crews to minimize potential case numbers.

“My goals for safety going forward are to continue what we are doing, pay attention to any areas or processes that may have changed,” Borge said. “We plan to continue our training programs and make sure everyone is doing their part to make coming to work as safe as it can be.”

BMLD had zero safety incidents, earning the department first place in Group A, which is comprised of MLPs with fewer than 15,000 worker-hours of exposure. The department is very familiar with the safety award, having earned it an impressive 20 times.

BMLD General Manager Mark Barakian credits the department’s success with training. In addition to the required annual OSHA training, the department organizes several other training opportunities on a variety of topics including rigging, protective grounding, and general workplace safety.

“Employee safety has always been a priority at BMLD, and we continue to look for new training and equipment to make the job as safe as possible,” Barakian said. “All the employees at BMLD understand and work together to achieve that goal.” ∞

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Construction and Major Renovations program, Lisowski issued a \$50,000 rebate check to the Food Bank at the groundbreaking ceremony to use towards the energy efficiency and decarbonization measures in the new building. The NextZero New Construction and Major Renovations program offers rebates to commercial and industrial projects that implement energy savings methods on new construction or renovation projects. The project will ensure efficient heating, cooling, and lighting measures that will result in significant annual energy savings.

“We are happy to welcome the Food Bank to Chicopee and support their goals of minimizing their carbon footprint while providing the necessary resources to the Western Massachusetts community during these challenging times,” said Lisowski.

The distribution center will have several high efficiency variable refrigerant flow units and ductless mini-split heat pumps, allowing more control over heating and cooling specific areas of

the building and ensuring that the food is stored safely and at the proper temperature. Eight energy recovery ventilators will also be installed to precondition the outside air by pre-cooling or pre-heating it depending on the time of year.

Efficient interior and exterior LED lighting, in a variety of styles and sizes, will be installed, saving the Food Bank money in comparison to less efficient lighting options. Additionally, insulated wall panels that exceed building code requirements will be installed in the office, warehouse, and refrigerated spaces to increase efficiency and decrease heating loss.

The heating, ventilation, and air conditioning measures combined with the LED lighting and insulation are expected to save the Food Bank nearly 160,000 kilowatt-hours per year, resulting in an estimated annual saving of approximately \$25,000.

Construction is expected to be completed next spring, and the Food Bank plans to fully move into the new headquarters in the summer of 2023. ∞

RMLD, General Manager, Honored with Groundbreaking Community Wind Award

Russell Municipal Light Department (RMLD) has received the 2022 Groundbreaking Community Wind Award from the non-profit organization, Windustry, for its involvement in the Holiday Hill Community Wind Project.

The Holiday Hill Community Wind Project is a two turbine, five-megawatt wind project located in Russell. RMLD General Manager Alan Robinson was heavily involved in the project beginning in 2009, when he received a \$55,000 grant from the Mass Clean Energy Center for a feasibility study, through the permitting process and the power purchase agreement with Chicopee Electric Light (CEL), Westfield Gas and Electric (WG&E), and a private wind/solar developer. The project was completed in 2019. It hit several roadblocks, but Robinson was determined to work with CEL and WG&E to see the project through.

“The location of the proposed project was favorable for development,” Robinson said. “The turbines’ shadow flicker and sound impacts were greatly reduced due to the topographic and vegetative features between the wind turbines and residential areas. Most importantly, the residents of Russell supported our group efforts.”

Robinson added that CEL and WG&E staff were pivotal to helping the project come to fruition by sharing their knowledge gained from working on larger projects. Robinson also collaborated with the local community by utilizing local businesses for several aspects of the construction process, including local excavating, landscaping, electrical, construction, and concrete companies.

Windustry is a non-profit organization based in Minneapolis



Alan Robinson and Nancy Boersig

that works locally, regionally, and nationally to build a path for clean energy in all communities. The Groundbreaking Community Wind Award is presented annually to an individual, group, or organization which has constructed a renewable energy project with a novel approach, new business model, or formed an innovative alliance to further community and distributed renewable energy.

RMLD and Robinson were nominated for the Groundbreaking Community Wind Award by

David Blittersdorf, President and CEO of AllEarth Renewables, whose company facilitated the Holiday Hill power purchase agreement and built this project.

“Al Robinson was amazing in his persistence to getting this wind project done,” Blittersdorf said. “We hit many speed bumps on the way to getting this project built, but Al was there each time to work with us to figure out a way forward.”

Since coming online in 2019, the Holiday Hill Community Wind Project has been performing well with no equipment failures. The three light departments each purchase a total of the project’s output; CEL purchases 3.4 megawatts annually, WG&E purchases 1.4 megawatts and RMLD’s share is .20 megawatts, which equates to 11.5 percent of the RMLD’s energy portfolio.

Robinson said he hopes Holiday Hill continues to provide reliable power for the life of the project and encourages other light departments to collaborate on future renewable projects. “It’s time for people to work together towards a common goal,” Robinson said. “A special thanks to Nancy Boersig (Town of Russell), Dan Howard (WG&E) and Jeff Cady (CEL) for the continued support through the years.” ∞

Directors, Officers Elected to MMWEC Board

Several officers and one director were elected to new terms at May 5 meetings of the MMWEC membership and Board of Directors.

Peter D. Dion, general manager of the Wakefield Municipal Gas & Light Department, was re-elected by the MMWEC membership to his 14th one-year term as president of MMWEC.

Michael J. Flynn, a gubernatorial appointee and Town of Wilbraham representative to the MMWEC board, was elected by the board to another one-year term as chairman. Flynn has been on the board for 20 years, and has served as chairman since 2014.

Representatives of MMWEC’s 20 member municipal utilities also voted to fill the remaining year of a three-year term on the MMWEC board. They elected Jonathan Blair, manager of the Ipswich Electric Light Department, to fill the remainder of the term for the outgoing Charles Orphanos of Peabody Municipal Light Plant.

Tara Rondeau, Manager of the Paxton Municipal Light Department, Christopher Roy, General Manager of Shrewsbury

Electric and Cable Operations, and Joseph Sollecito, General Manager of the Mansfield Municipal Electric Department, were all re-elected to new, three-year terms.

Additional MMWEC officers for the coming year, as elected by the board, are Ronald C. DeCurzio, chief executive officer and secretary; Matthew J. Ide, treasurer; Maria McCarthy, assistant treasurer; Buckley, Richardson and Gelinas, LLC, general counsel; and Kathryn M. Roy, assistant secretary.

Other MMWEC directors, elected previously by the membership, are John Driscoll, General Manager of Templeton Light and Water Plant, James Lavelle, General Manager of Holyoke Gas & Electric, and Kevin Kelly, Manager of Groton Electric Light Department. Charmaine White of Springfield is a gubernatorial appointee to the MMWEC board. Luis Vitorino, representing the Town of Ludlow, is also on the board. ∞



Jonathan Blair

WMGLD, SELCO Celebrate Earth Day by Distributing Free Trees

To promote sustainability and decarbonization, two MMWEC Members have distributed trees to their customers. Wakefield Municipal Gas and Light Department (WMGLD) distributed 61 trees through its inaugural “A Shade Above Initiative,” and Shrewsbury Electric and Cable Operations (SELCO) distributed 750 trees as part of its Earth Day event.

WMGLD organized the “A Shade Above Initiative” to support the American Public Power Association’s “Tree Power Initiative.” Customers were invited to apply for the program. The applications were reviewed by WMGLD and an arborist to determine which customers’ property were well suited for trees. Once approved, WMGLD, the arborist, and the town tree warden assessed the property and discussed with customers which tree type to plant. The department offered four different types of shade trees that can be planted at the rear of the property to optimize shading and four types of utility-friendly trees with a maximum height of 25 feet to prevent interference with utility lines.

“A Shade Above” was originally designed to accommodate 50 trees, but due to the popularity of the program, WMGLD is moving forward with planting 61 trees for customers.

“This tree initiative emphasizes the importance of trees as a natural solution to improving and beautifying the community, and reducing energy consumption,” WMGLD General Manager Peter

Dion said.

This is WMGLD’s first residential tree planting initiative, though the department has planted nearly 200 trees in the community in public areas.

SELCO distributed nearly 750 trees to customers during its annual Earth Day event. The department allowed two trees per household and customers had the option of choosing between six different varieties. The department also donated trees to the Shrewsbury Department of Public Works to be planted in local parks.

“An essential component of achieving net-zero emissions is capturing or sequestering carbon,” said SELCO Director of Integrated Resources and Communications Jackie Pratt. “Offsetting emissions with afforestation is a great mechanism for carbon sequestration.”

Since 2005, SELCO has given away more than 12,000 tree seedlings, resulting in the sequestration of an estimated 1,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

In addition to the tree distribution, SELCO used the Earth Day event as an opportunity to promote the various incentives and programs the department offers through the MMWEC NextZero electrification and decarbonization program, as well as various other sustainability and efficiency efforts, including demonstrations of electric vehicles and battery powered lawn equipment. ∞

WMGLD Adds Third Electric Vehicle to Fleet

Wakefield Municipal Gas and Light Department (WMGLD) is promoting electrification by adding electric vehicles to its fleet. WMGLD recently purchased a 2022 Ford E-Transit 350 van for its gas division.

The Ford E-Transit van will be used by WMGLD’s gas service technicians. WMGLD Business Analyst Joseph Collins said the department is in the process of applying for state and federal rebates for the van.

WMGLD currently has two other electric vehicles in its fleet. The department purchased a Nissan Leaf in November 2021, which is used by its engineers for conducting site visits and by its Substation and Dig Safe crew. WMGLD also has a 2021 Hyundai Santa Fe plug-in hybrid, which is used by WMGLD General Manager Peter Dion.

To accommodate the fleet electric vehicles, WMGLD has four electric vehicle chargers installed at its headquarters. The department has two standard Level 2 electric vehicle chargers and recently installed two additional Level 2 Fleet chargers, which have



WMGLD’s E-Transit Van

dual cords and a higher output than the standard chargers. This summer, the department will also install a Level 3 DC fast electric vehicle charger. WMGLD plans to apply for grant funding for the Level 2 fleet and Level 3 DC chargers.

Dion said purchasing electric vehicles for the department is part of its decarbonization plan.

“Our goal is to have net-zero carbon emissions on operations by 2025 and this is one step closer to realizing that goal,” Dion said.

Collins said the department has purchased a 2022 Altec hybrid bucket truck for its electrical division, which is expected to arrive this summer. WMGLD is exploring the idea of purchasing a hybrid line truck for its fleet.

“We are excited about shifting toward more renewable solutions to transportation and we continue to do our best to invest in capital and infrastructure to pave the way for clean energy,” Collins said. ∞