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MAY-JUNE 2026

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AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION
Powering Strong Communities

The American Public Power Association is the voice of not-for-profit, community-owned utilities that power approximately 2,000 towns and cities nationwide. We represent public power before the federal government to protect the interests of the more than 55 million people that public power utilities serve across the United States and its territories. We advise on electricity policy, grid technology and operations, and workforce development in support of safe, modern, and resilient utilities.

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Public Power Is Responsive

BY SCOTT CORWIN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

Photo courtesy Austin Energy, Texas

"In the township, as well as everywhere else, the people are the only source of power… A nation may establish a system of free government, but without the spirit of municipal institutions it cannot have the spirit of liberty."
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

As we get ready to gather for our National Conference in Boston, coinciding with our country's 250th year, it is notable how the values of our industry coincide with our nation's founding principles. A core value of the public power model is that local governance makes a utility more accountable to the people it serves.

Local utilities listen and take action accordingly. Being proactive and responsive is very different from being reactive. For public power, the concept of responsiveness has many facets — the service we provide to our community includes both the delivery of reliable power and the anticipation of future needs and disruptions. Responsiveness is about addressing emergencies and being able to quickly restore power in outages or collaborating with others to support community resilience. It is about conducting meaningful outreach and having ample opportunities for feedback (and listening to that feedback).

This issue of *Public Power* showcases how APPA members and staff are pursuing enhanced responsiveness. Utilities are modernizing their operations centers to improve services and incorporate technology advancements (page 6), they are developing outreach strategies that build trust across the community (page 30), and they are leveraging data for better decision-making (page 14). Responsiveness is also about collaborating with a variety of partners where appropriate, such as MEAG Power's efforts to train first responders in substation safety and security (page 38), and participating in alliances like the Cyber Mutual Assistance program (page 40).

An important role for APPA is to provide you with information and tools so you can remain aware of and plan for anticipated community needs. Whether that is staying updated on how various risks are changing (page 20) or knowing where emerging technologies stand and how they might fit into your planning (page 24). Our team works closely with members who participate in a variety of working groups and committees to develop and deliver tools that can help you do your job more efficiently and effectively. One such example is the Emergency Action Plan Template, developed in conjunction with members of the Mutual Aid Committee, that provides guidance and example language for you to create or update a comprehensive emergency action plan (page 22).

APPA strives always to be responsive to our members. In this spirit, I am thankful to each of you who provided feedback on our recent member survey. I am encouraged to hear about where we are having a positive effect on your work, and I appreciate the constructive feedback about how we can take further action to better support you. Thank you for your role in helping us meet your needs and in furthering the mission of maintaining and enhancing the excellent service of public power across the nation.

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Modernizing Utility Operations Centers for Growth and Resilience

BY ADAM PATTERSON, CONTENT SPECIALIST, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

ALP Utilities' new operations center in Alexandria, Minnesota.

Electric utilities are under growing pressure to manage rising demand, strengthen grid reliability, and respond more quickly to outages. At the center of that effort is the utility operations center, where crews are dispatched, outages are coordinated, and grid activity is monitored in real time. To meet these demands, many public power utilities are investing in new operations centers designed to improve storm response, streamline field operations, and support increasingly complex electric systems.

Responsive Operations

When Clallam County Public Utility District in Washington first opened its Port Angeles operations center in 1966, the utility served about 6,600 meters. Clallam PUD now serves over 28,000 meters and is looking to build a new facility, one designed and outfitted to better suit its current service needs.

Shailesh Shere, assistant general manager at Clallam PUD, said the older building crammed several functions into one space.

"It is a facility that's owned by Port of Port Angeles and was makeshift-modified over subsequent decades. We've made minor modifications to ensure that a level of efficiency is achieved, but it has become markedly inadequate for the needs that we now have in 2026," Shere said.

Clallam PUD has been proactive in not only planning the structure of its new operations center, but in outlining the utility's strategic priorities and how investments in a new building will meet them.

"Wildfire mitigation is one of our major concerns looking forward. Our vegetation management crew can't be fully supported in the ways we need with our current building. The communication that needs to happen between the vegetation management crew and maintenance-aligned crews is not well facilitated because they're housed in different sections of the complex," Shere said.

With the current building's lease set to expire in 2027, Clallam PUD began planning for the new operations center in 2020. The utility ensured that discussion with its board and outreach to its customers were foundational parts of the process.

Shere said that a series of presentations were made during open public meetings not only to gauge the board's interest in the direction the PUD should go, but also to encourage public education and participation in the decision-making process as early as possible. The board and general manager mailed a letter to all customers outlining the project's scope and necessity.

"The education piece was the most important thing from the outset, since customers don't automatically understand the nitty-gritty of what an operations center is and why building a new one is important," Shere said.

The long planning timeline allowed Clallam PUD to map a financing strategy that avoids shifting the entire costs to customer rates. Shere said the PUD will use about $9 million from reserves and raise the rest needed for the building costs through tax-exempt municipal bonds.

The PUD encompasses a considerable service area, with contrasting terrains that range from a rainforest on its western side with up to 170 inches of rain annually to dry territory in its east end with less than 20 inches of annual rainfall. The new operations facility will be in the center of its territory and will both serve customers in the area and support two other operational facilities on either side.

Celebrating the opening of Huntsville Utilities' new operations center. Photo courtesy Amanda Kemp.

With the new operations center slated to begin construction next year, Clallam PUD intends to measure its success largely through how much the new facility advances responsiveness. The intent is to "dispatch our line crews as quickly and safely as possible with everything that they need lined up before, during, and after a grid incident, so that outage durations for customers are reduced by a significant amount of time."

For other public power utilities looking to modernize their operations centers, Shere emphasized how important a proactive approach can be, from aligning the building's design with the utility's strategic needs to allowing enough time to map out both financial considerations and potential hurdles well in advance.

"One of the biggest lessons we've learned is the importance of early planning and clearly defining how this operations center would function, not just in your daily operations, but also during emergencies. Also clearly communicating and getting buy-in from the board and the public so you have full support when you start the project," Shere said.

Resilient Structures, Reliable Service

Huntsville Utilities opened its new operations center in October 2025. Its features marked advancements in both structural soundness and technical capacities to proactively meet the service needs of Alabama's most populous city.

Chris Jones, Huntsville Utilities' chief operating officer, credited the idea for an updated operations center to Mike Counts, vice president of operations, who has been with the utility for more than 30 years.

"Our community's growing, our system's growing, our system's getting more complex, and Mike had the foresight to see we were going to outgrow our operations center," Jones said.

To better understand how an updated operations center could support Huntsville's growth, utility leaders sought out an inside look at other facilities. Jones recalled how Counts and other utility leaders started by visiting other major public power

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Clallam PUD's original operations center. Photo courtesy Clallam PUD.

operations centers in the region, including in Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Nashville in Tennessee, and at an Alabama Power facility.

After both internal deliberations and speaking with other utilities, Huntsville determined that the best course of action was not to expand its existing facility, but to build a new operations center.

The cost of building the new center was evaluated at $34 million, with Huntsville laying out a borrowing and repayment plan that was made feasible by the utility's yearslong minimization of debts and responsible management of existing capital expenditures.

"We borrowed the money, so that way we had the cash available to pay for our operations center and a few other system improvements over the next 20 years. It was a big enough ticket that our normal capital funding process was going to be pretty stretched, and borrowing seemed appropriate," Jones said. "Thankfully, we don't have a lot of debt, so that fit within our financial plan fairly easily."

As Jones summarized, the new operations center was built with three priorities in mind: "redundancy and security, addressing our future needs, and improving our technology."

Huntsville contends with an annual tornado season that typically occurs from March to May, and the new facility was reinforced to withstand tornadoes and other natural disasters.

"It's a concrete structure with a concrete foundation, concrete walls, the doors are incredibly thick, and it has redundant electric feeds, a backup generator, and redundant HVAC equipment. The outside generator is inside a steel cage, so it's also protected from tornado debris," Jones said.

He noted that Huntsville weighed whether to build to protect against other threats, such as electromagnetic pulses,

but ultimately decided to focus on ensuring the structure can withstand the most likely risks it will face.

Huntsville's new operations center is also outfitted with an array of monitoring stations that allow the utility to oversee multiple technologies and critical processes within a single hub.

"It can show multiple things simultaneously. It can be divided into our system map, weather surveillance, our outage management system, our SCADA and our system load all at once. It gives our operators a situational awareness that they've never had before," Jones said.

This has shown immediate payoff in terms of incident response and outage management, with Jones noting, "The better integrated your outage management system is, the quicker you can respond to outages." He added that included developing an integrated radio and phone system all managed within one console.

For utilities looking to build new operations centers of their own, Jones emphasized the importance of a thorough pre-planning process where strategic and operational needs are mapped onto the capacities of the new facility. He also advised planners to seek staff input throughout the process.

"One of the biggest lessons learned is … making sure early on we got our operators involved in some of those discussions about what the layout should look like and how the workspace should flow, because they're going to be working in there," Jones said.

Anticipating Community Needs

ALP Utilities in Alexandria, Minnesota, opened a new operations center in August 2025. The town's original facilities first opened in 1967. Like Clallam PUD and Huntsville,

> **"Don't be afraid to take the steps. You're always going to have issues, complications, and trials. There might be some people you are not going to win over, but that doesn't mean you ever stop talking with and sharing your progress and goals with the community at every chance you get."**
>
> **TED CASH,** GENERAL MANAGER,
> **ALP UTILITIES,** MINNESOTA

Alexandria has grown substantially, with the utility's customers increasing from 7,000 in 1967 to more than 15,000 today.

Ted Cash, ALP's general manager, sees the building of the new operations center as a fulfillment of the public power utility's obligation to meet the demands of a growing community.

"Back in 2019, it was obvious we needed new facilities. The ad hoc nature of municipal growth means you can let growth get ahead of strategy, and so you often make ad hoc improvements rather than lay out a plan that anticipates them wholesale," Cash said.

ALP staff realized these as-needed buildouts were risking the utility falling behind in responsiveness, with Cash noting that "with our old center, when we needed more operations vehicles, we just built another garage instead of asking how we can figure this out longer-term."

ALP realized that building a new operations center would be more efficient from both a management and cost perspective, and the utility began laying out a financing plan that used a combination of cash reserves and bond revenue to raise capital without interrupting other projects or shifting costs to its customers.

The broader Alexandria community has been receptive to the center's development, an outcome Cash credits to ALP's positive relations with the public, including raising awareness around the role the utility plays in ensuring local quality of life.

"About a year and a half in advance, when we'd have our open house, we'd start talking about the new operations center. We talk about it on the radio and at public-facing events. Alexandria is a fantastic community, and they understand that you have to invest money long term to make sure you're not degrading your facilities to a point where they go from an asset to a detriment," Cash said.

He emphasized that ALP mapped out the facility to better consolidate operations within one complex — making it easier to house trucks and dispatch crews — and provide the best possible work environment for staff.

"I don't want people who come to work to feel like they're unappreciated. They deserve a good work environment with natural light and a climate they can control. Really make sure that your employees have a workspace that's conducive to what you're asking them to achieve," Cash said.

ALP's focus on strategic planning and mapping its needs to te building's design resulted in the operations center being completed $1.44 million under budget. Cash sees multiple lessons other utilities could learn from ALP's example, particularly the importance of iterative planning, maintaining an eye on long-term development, and ensuring community buy-in.

"Don't be afraid to take the steps," he said. "You're always going to have issues, complications, and trials. There might be some people you are not going to win over, but that doesn't mean you ever stop talking with and sharing your progress and goals with the community at every chance you get."

With Covered Cable, Littleton Electric Delivers Near-Perfect Reliability

Littleton Electric Light and Water Department, a public power utility serving heavily wooded areas of Massachusetts, including Littleton, Boxborough, and portions of Devens, learned an important lesson during a December 2008 ice storm that caused widespread power outages.

While it took its neighboring IOU up to two weeks to restore power in central Massachusetts, Littleton reinstated service to the majority of its customers within five days because it had installed covered cable, said Nick Lawler, general manager at LELWD.

The utility had installed the covered cable in Littleton but not Boxborough. The areas without the covered cable — which is called spacer cable and has polyurethane coatings that protect against outages — suffered the most from the storm.

"With the covered cable, when a storm hits, it's not going to take your power out, and you don't have to send crews out to repair it and fix it. So there's the payoff," said Scott Larsen, field representative at Marmon Utility and a former lineworker for LELWD.

After the storm, the utility installed spacer cable in much of Boxborough.

The investment was paid for by part of the $1-$2 million annual budget LELWD's board of directors allots for resilience and system hardening, which includes upgrading equipment and putting in the "best products that we can," Lawler said.

In addition to investing in hardening, Littleton evaluated underground wire along with the traditional bare wire and covered cable installed in Boxborough and Littleton. For new developments, the utility often installs underground cable at the request of the neighborhood. In that case, the developer pays for the extra cost of the system.

While undergrounding wires boosts reliability compared to bare wire systems and improves the look of the neighborhood, they can be a challenge to maintain and inspect because they're not as accessible as overhead wires, Lawler said.

Covered cable was the clear choice for LELWD. Its foray into covered cable began in the 1970s, when Marmon Utility, located in New Hampshire, became an important partner, providing Hendrix overhead distribution products, Lawler said. The utility helped test prototypes of the Marmon Utility products.

Marmon Utility's spacer cable is supported by an aluminum or aluminum-alumoweld messenger — bimetallic wire made of a thick, inseparably welded layer of aluminum on a steel core — which carries the system's weight-bearing load. The system works well in wooded areas because it can withstand the weight of a tree or other loads up to about 32,000 pounds.

The multi-layered cable differs from traditional bare-wire systems because conventional systems have no coating to protect them. The covered cable systems have both low- and high-density polyurethane coatings.

"It has a structure that won't allow any amperage to leak out and cause outages," Larsen explained.

Even if a tree makes contact with the cable, there won't be a power outage. With bare wire, a falling tree in a heavily wooded area can spark outages.

Over the past 15 years, as LELWD worked to ensure its system is insulated, its reliability numbers have improved. "We always had good reliability numbers, but they're almost perfect now," Lawler said.

LELWD earned Certificates of Excellence in reliability from APPA in 2015 and in 2017-2025, said Connor Reardon, energy and sustainability manager at LELWD.

The utility's system average interruption duration index — which measures the average total duration of power interruptions in a year that customers experience — was 8.2 minutes in 2025, according to Reardon. Its system average interruption frequency index — which measures how many interruptions, on average, customers experienced — was 0.11 in 2025.

Delivering this level of reliability to the community is satisfying for the utility's employees.

"If you're a lineman, you have to work in some pretty terrible weather. You have to want to come to work and find value in the job that you do. You have to care about the community. Being public power, we're all invested in the community that we serve and the people that we see on a daily basis. It's very rewarding," Lawler said.

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From Instinct to Insight

How Utilities Are Using Data to Improve Service

BY BETSY LOEFF,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Photo courtesy Northern Wasco County PUD, Oregon

Utility workers make decisions every day. Some are routine, and some have real consequences for reliability, budgets, and customers. Today, those decisions don't have to rely on experience and instinct alone. With better access to data and analysis tools, public power utilities are making more informed calls about what to fix, what to replace, and where to invest next.

Scoring Greater Impact

Managers at Northern Wasco County PUD in Oregon attach a numeric score to every project they consider. They create the score by measuring how projects align with strategic initiatives, such as implementing innovative technology to enhance service delivery or modernizing infrastructure to increase reliability.

Jeff Teel, chief operating officer for the PUD, considers the process of assigning scores both an art and a science. "For every one of our initiatives, we work with a consultant to translate the project into dollars because we need some sort of common unit to compare one area with another," he explained. "How do you convert technological innovation to dollars? There's a lot of going back and forth."

Data plays a big part in the equations. For instance, Teel said the PUD can calculate the cost of an outage at every protective device in the system because the utility's advanced metering infrastructure and geographic information systems clarify how much load is downstream from the breaker or fuse that's down. After working with a wildfire consultancy, the team also knows ignition risk at every point in the system and can calculate risk to both utility and community assets.

Engineers at Traverse City Light & Power in Michigan also use a scoring technique to prioritize equipment maintenance and replacements. "We have an AMI system, and we're using meter data for customer usage. We use the GIS for installation dates for wires, poles, and such. We also use reliability data from our outage management system," explained Tony Chartrand, the utility's director of electric engineering and operations.

All these data points feed into the stochastic energy development system created by the National Laboratory of the Rockies to help utilities simulate new technologies, demand shifts, and capacity additions in their systems.

TCLP's engineering team reviews the analytics and compiles the scoring for potential projects. Factors that lead to a high score and elevated priority include those that address capacity issues or support reliability, whether TCLP has access to the equipment, and age, as the utility has some conductors that are more than 100 years old.

After scoring potential projects for prioritization, the TCLP team applies a defined methodology that includes field inspection and more data review. "Our scoring system tells us if this is an area we should focus on," said Chartrand. "Then we have to determine what we need to replace and what we can reuse to keep project costs down."

If, for example, the utility is looking at rebuilding a section of line, there's a checklist of questions to be answered, such as: Is the conductor over a certain age? Does it show frayed strands, evidence of charring, or arc damage? Do AMI data show overloading? Do outage data indicate faults on the line?

Chartrand said that this approach has decreased the costs of projects TCLP undertakes. In one project, the city was widening an alleyway, which meant that power lines had to be moved. Rather than replace everything at once — something Chartrand said he has seen many utilities do as a matter of course — TCLP crews evaluated which equipment could be reused. The project would have cost $178,600 if all transformers and conductors had been replaced, but by reusing still-reliable equipment, Chartrand's team spent only $36,000.

"Our scoring system tells us if this is an area we should focus on. Then we have to determine what we need to replace and what we can reuse to keep project costs down."

TONY CHARTRAND, DIRECTOR OF ELECTRIC ENGINEERING AND OPERATIONS, **TRAVERSE CITY LIGHT AND POWER,** MICHIGAN

Photo courtesy Traverse City Light and Power, Michigan

At the same time, the team also updates GIS models with information found in the field. "The idea is to constantly update the main model as we're doing projects," he said. "It will help us identify what needs replacement today and what will age out later."

Making Smarter Decisions

Teel has also been able to make better data-driven decisions at Northern Wasco County PUD, particularly around reliability, since the utility integrated the American Public Power Association's PowerTRX Reliability tracking and analysis platform with its SCADA system.

"This was an intentional decision to improve visibility and understanding of outage indices throughout the organization," Teel said. "Now, reliability indices are something our people see every day."

He added that integrating PowerTRX Reliability helped the utility automate outage tracking. "The AMI system reports outages to the outage management system, so there's less human involvement in recording events. It's more accurate and less labor-intensive."

The constant reliability tracking helped Wasco PUD engineers see the effect one substation outage had on its overall indices. In the case it examined, the cause was a raccoon that had been searching for bird eggs atop a transformer and the contact led to a long, widespread outage.

"We realized that yes, this is infrequent, but it could happen again, and it has a major impact, so it's worth spending staff resources to investigate a solution," Teel said. That solution was found by the utility biologist, who knew that a harmless chemical made from grapes creates a scent that people can't detect but birds find loathsome. The chemical drove the birds out of the substation, leaving raccoons without a reason to stick around.

In another instance, the team identified a particular outage-prone section of line. Though it was scheduled for rebuilding, the permitting process would delay the project by two years, so PUD engineers added another recloser and dramatically reduced its outage frequency in the interim.

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> **"It's pretty incredible how these models can be used to assess potential impacts to infrastructure. We've evaluated potential direct risks to transmission lines, distribution lines, and substations, as well as potential changes in things like flooding and high-wind events."**
>
> **JORDAN BRANHAM,** NATURAL HAZARD ANALYTICS AND RESLIENCE GROUP LEAD, **ARGONNE NATIONAL LABORATORY**

The data also help Teel explain investments. When utility engineers decided to replace aged #6 copper wire in the distribution system, the numbers showed why. "It's prone to breaking, especially in the winter if there's any snow or ice load on it," Teel said. "This wire caused a lot of impact on our reliability. Being able to convey that visually helped us impart to the board why investing in replacement wire matters."

Future-Proofing the Utility

Replacing wires and other grid assets may help next year's reliability indices, but utilities also need to think and plan for long-term service and affordability.

"Utilities often think about making investments that need to last for 50 years or more," said Jordan Branham, Ph.D., leader of Argonne National Laboratory's Natural Hazard Analytics and Resilience Group. This is why Branham's team works with utilities and other infrastructure-based organizations on using ClimRR, a modeling tool that forecasts future weather conditions for 12-by-12 kilometer tracts of land.

The tool incorporates modeling expertise from across the globe via the World Climate Research Programme. Normally, scientists run models reflecting 100-by-100 km grid cells, so Branham and his team scaled the data down to a higher spatial resolution using supercomputing at Argonne to provide actionable insights for utilities and other ClimRR users. Now, utilities can forecast what weather conditions may be like as far out as 2090.

"It's pretty incredible how these models can be used to assess potential impacts to infrastructure," Branham said. "We've evaluated potential direct risks to transmission lines, distribution lines, and substations, as well as potential changes in things like flooding and high-wind events."

He added that his group has also evaluated how ratings of future grid elements may need to change. "For example, ratings for different transmission components might need to be tweaked in the future because there could be more high-heat events that coincide with low-wind events, so transmission lines may not be able to cool down," Branham said.

Right now, Argonne is in the second year of a two-year collaboration with APPA to pinpoint future wildfire risks and work with public power providers on mitigation strategies. Charles Doktycz, Ph.D., is the Argonne research analyst who helps lead this effort. "We're working directly with public power utilities to understand what data they need so they can build out their wildfire mitigation plans," he said.

Now in the second cohort of APPA members who volunteered to work with Doktycz and his team, each participating utility gets a tailored wildfire risk profile report. "This is especially useful for utilities serving smaller service territories," he said, "because off-the-shelf maps or national maps aren't as useful for local-level planning."

> **"It's not about the data. It's about what you do with data and how you use it to tell a story."**
>
> **JEFF TEEL,** CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
> **NORTHERN WASCO COUNTY PUD,** OREGON

Some utilities Doktycz is working with also are looking at how specific species of vegetation might be affected by various weather factors and wood-destroying pests. In the Pacific Northwest, for instance, a utility is examining how hotter summers and reduced precipitation will affect the health of Douglas Fir trees in its territory.

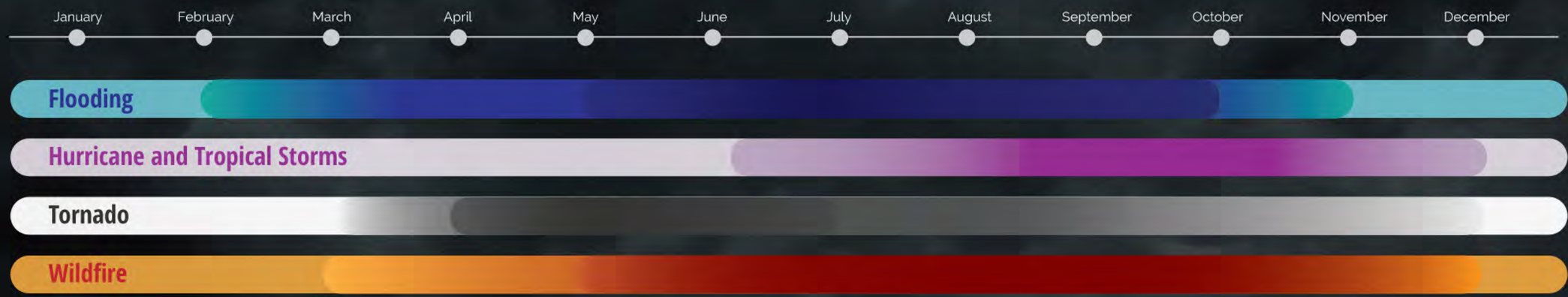
Likewise, a Colorado utility is concerned about mountain pine beetles that kill pine trees and create large swaths of dead forest, increasing wildfire fuel and affecting forest hydrology. "Temperatures in the midcentury are going to increase in shoulder seasons. Those warmer spring and fall temperatures provide a more suitable climate for the mountain pine beetle to emerge, potentially giving them a whole second spawning season," Doktycz explained.

The Argonne experts have been holding weather resilience workshops for public power providers across the country. In addition, the ClimRR maps are online and available to the public, and the laboratory's team is willing to answer questions from utilities and other entities using them. "We've been trying to build our portal to be as useful as possible," Doktycz said. "It doesn't do any good just sitting there with pretty colors and data."

This view is similar to Teel's attitude about the data his utility examines. "It's not about the data," he said. "It's about what you do with data and how you use it to tell a story."

A RISK FOR ALL SEASONS

No matter the time of year, communities throughout the U.S. face risk of weather events that could affect the electric grid. Public power utilities planning for these risks should stay aware of when these risks are most likely to occur — and how their frequency, intensity, and geographic reach are changing.



Flooding can occur at any time of year and is a risk across the United States, from heavy rain, snowmelt, or coastal storm surges. Flooding causes an average of $5 billion a year in damage in the U.S — more than any other severe weather-related event. Critical infrastructure facilities at risk of flooding are anticipated to increase 6% through 2050.

More category 3 or greater hurricanes developed in the Atlantic in the last 25 years (91) than did in 40 years from 1960-1999 (81).

Risk of destructive tornadoes, historically concentrated in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas, is shifting east into Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The high risk in Florida is also extending to more of the southeast, which is seeing more days with conditions conducive to tornado development.

While risk of wildfire is year-round and dependent on region, the peak wildfire season in the U.S. has extended by two months since the 1950s. Wildfire risk is still highest in the arid parts of the western United States, but they are becoming more common in the Great Plains, Midwest, and Alaska.

While blizzards are expected to continue to become less frequent, risk of freezing rain, leading to ice accumulation, is increasing in northern parts of the U.S.

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Utilities can explore risks specific to their area with tools such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool.

HAVING A PLAN LEADS TO BETTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE

BY GIACOMO WRAY, OPERATIONS SERVICES SENIOR MANAGER, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

In the aftermath of back-to-back hurricanes in September and October 2024, the American Public Power Association's Mutual Aid Committee gathered for a hot wash — also known as an after action review — to discuss the response and recovery efforts for those events. The Public Power Mutual Aid Network was activated to support the response to hurricanes Francine, Helene, and Milton. The response included coordinating with more than 220 utilities in 32 states and with federal and industry partners.

While the robust public power response demonstrated the network's resilience and ability to support back-to-back hurricanes in the same region of the country, it also uncovered that many smaller utilities lacked a formal emergency action plan. We issued a survey to understand more about what could help utilities with this planning, and we found that even the larger public power utilities with existing plans could use support — some because their plans were out of date or had gaps in information, and others because their teams lacked awareness in key areas of carrying out the plan.

Creating a formal emergency action plan, or EAP, isn't a procedural hurdle. It's an investment in quicker restoration and community resilience following a major event. Gathering information on the contacts, roles, and resources needed for emergency response ensures a structured and coordinated approach across the utility. It also helps familiarize mutual aid crews with what they need to know to help with restoration.

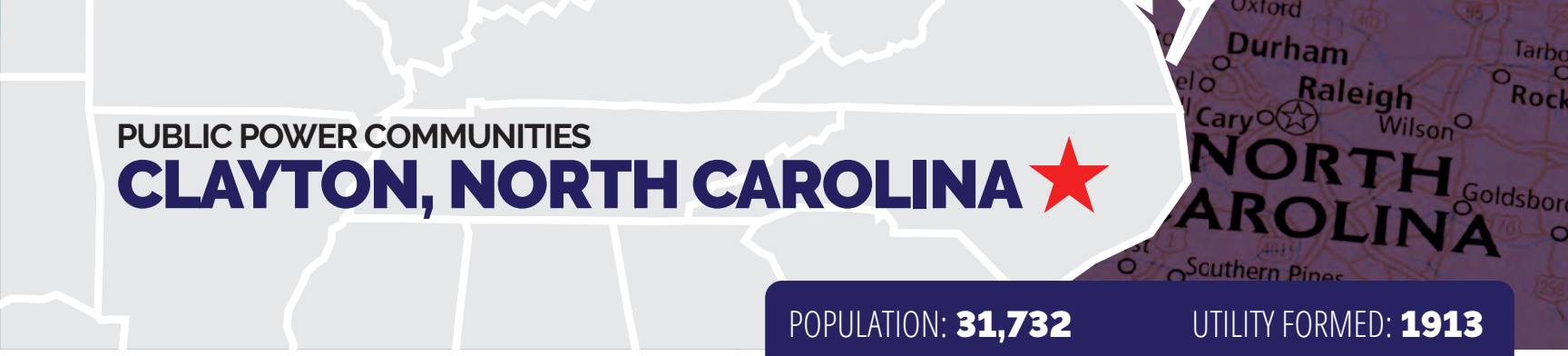
To help utilities create their own plans, we worked with members of the Mutual Aid Committee to develop a new Emergency Action Plan Template. Utilities can go through the easy-to-use template (in Microsoft Word) to fill in details about key contacts, equipment inventories, communication protocols, response triggers, and logistics. It helps utilities see what resources they have available to respond to emergencies and creates a central space to detail specific roles, responsibilities, and procedures.

The template also includes a sample damage assessment form, which was adapted from the form Lafayette Utilities System in Louisiana uses. We heard from members about how challenging it can be to conduct proper damage assessments after major events, so the form offers a helpful starting point for gathering the details necessary for effective incident response.

We look forward to hearing how you use the template and whether there are further areas of guidance that would be helpful for your emergency preparedness and response efforts. As one example, we're developing new scenarios for the Tabletop Exercise in a Box Toolkit that reflect additional potential risks to the grid.

Creating a solid EAP is a first step to facilitating faster decision-making in emergencies. Once you have a plan, you have to test it to make sure it works. You can also go beyond local exercises and understand how your planning and procedures compare to your peers' practices, such as through the Mutual Aid community group on APPA Engage.

No matter where you are on your emergency preparedness journey, APPA and the Mutual Aid Committee are here to support you. Just let us know how we can help.



PUBLIC POWER COMMUNITIES

CLAYTON, NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION: **31,732** UTILITY FORMED: **1913**

ELECTRIC CUSTOMERS: **9,500** UTILITY EMPLOYEES: **14**

The town of Clayton, North Carolina, emerged from a community that was founded in 1770 when the British-appointed Governor of the colonial province, William Tryon (later infamous for a failed plot to kidnap George Washington), cut a road through the territory on his way to confront a pre-American Revolution insurrection in nearby Hillsborough. The town grew rapidly after a local rail station was built in 1866, and was formally incorporated in 1869.

The electric department in Clayton was formed in 1913, when the city decided to manage its own electric supply, as it saw the major power providers at the time choosing instead to focus on developing in the larger areas nearby.

Clayton's proximity to North Carolina's research triangle — the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill — gives new residents the opportunity to settle in a more close-knit town at commuting distance from the nearby metro areas. The electric department takes its role as a steward of the town's quality of life seriously, particularly in ensuring infrastructure and service quality keep pace with the town's rapid growth.

"The thing I like about working here is we're very customer-focused. Our bread and butter is service to the community, and our response times are a lot quicker because of this small community that we work in… When I came to work here [in 2001], most of the downtown still had a 4-kilovolt system — much of which was installed in the 1920s. Right now, we're continuing to upgrade the system, especially through replacing outdated transclosures and aging underground cable," said Mack Keen, electric system superintendent.

Clayton was home to fewer than 7,000 residents at the turn of the 21st century, but boomed to around 16,000 by 2010. The town's population currently stands at a little more than 31,000, and electric system director Matt Proctor believes the population could double again over the next 10 years.

"We're looking at growing our electric distribution system by installing overhead lines to newer areas of town, while also reconductoring existing lines to accommodate more load," Proctor said.

This growth has caused a shift within the town's public power utility, with the department looking to implement and leverage the technologies needed to continue providing quality service to a rapidly growing population.

"From a technology standpoint, we're working through the transition of Clayton going from a small-town utility with a mindset of keeping the lights on, to taking that next step to be even more customer-focused through leveraging technology. For example, we've deployed an outage management system and a computerized maintenance management system that we are continually improving on and becoming more reliant for day-to-day operations," Proctor said.

Despite these technical changes, the core ethos of the town's public power utility remains unchanged. This has included a commitment to community engagement encompassing both education and charitable fundraising.

"We participate in a lot of touch-a-truck events and career days at schools. In the fall there's a harvest festival where we set up a booth with equipment like a cutaway transformer to explain to how those work. During that event, we do a raffle for the Fallen Lineman Foundation to raise money for injured linemen," Keen said.

For Clayton's electric department, this focus on getting ahead of the demands of a growing population all ties back to a sense of personal commitment to upholding the town's quality of life through exceptional service.

"We take a lot of pride in that, and I think that's not just Clayton, that's public power across the board," Proctor said.

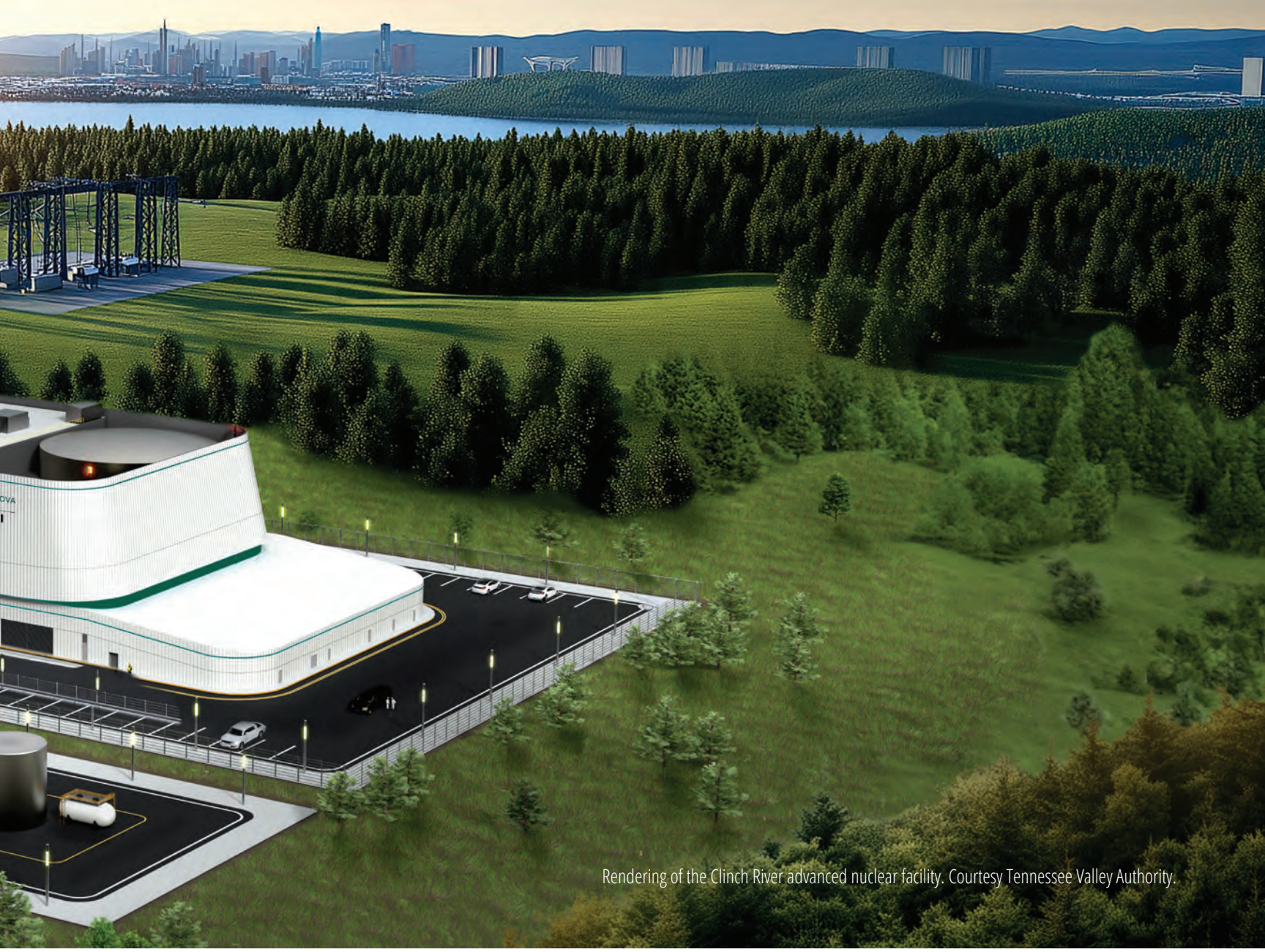
Preparing for Advanced Nuclear Technologies

What Public Power Should Know to Ready the Grid for SMRs, Fusion

BY SUSAN PARTAIN, DIRECTOR, CONTENT STRATEGY, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

Following decades of research and development, advanced nuclear technologies are now moving ahead into demonstration and deployment. Those backing them are navigating the accompanying challenges around ensuring they can deliver affordably and on time. Despite these challenges, new nuclear has shown immense potential for meeting some of America's most pressing energy demands — whether in meeting load growth or reducing emissions associated with electricity production.

Public power providers not currently part of these deployments can still stay aware of how to prepare their grid — and their communities — for tomorrow's technology.



Rendering of the Clinch River advanced nuclear facility. Courtesy Tennessee Valley Authority.

Meeting the Moment

Unlike the large reactors built in the 1970s and 1980s, the next generation of nuclear technologies do not share a common design, needs, nor functions. The technologies vary, from larger advanced light water reactors such as units 3 and 4 at Plant Vogtle in Georgia, to small modular reactor designs and microreactors that can support industrial processes.

The two units at Plant Vogtle, which came online in 2023 and 2024, are the first in the U.S. to use the advanced AP1000 reactor, which has a simplified design, smaller footprint, and enhanced safety features compared to more traditional reactors. MEAG Power, a joint action agency serving public power utilities in Georgia, is a 22.7% owner of plant Vogtle. The two units combined 2,200 MW represent the only newly constructed nuclear capacity added to the U.S. electric grid since the 1990s.

More technologies are looking to soon follow suit. The Nuclear Energy Institute has a map of the advanced projects in development, which shows 90 projects either under construction, planned, or proposed throughout North America. That total includes microreactors for research and experimentation up through the 1,200 MW advanced reactor to expand the Darlington Plant in Ontario. The Energy Information Administration detailed about 30 different designs in development, organized by those using water, molten salt, gas, and sodium as coolants.

Per NEI's map, nearly 10 GW of new nuclear are either under construction or planned. The Ontario project is expected to be operational by 2029, making it the next major deployment. Marc Nichol, executive director of new nuclear at NEI, noted how several other designs have been moving ahead with the necessary approvals from the Nuclear Regulatory

Commission. Among the projects for electricity generation in the further stages of development are TerraPower's Natrium demonstration project for a 345-MW facility in Wyoming; a 100-MW portion of a Kairos Power SMR in Tennessee; a 70-MW Aalo-x demonstration with Idaho Falls Power; and a 330-MW facility in Texas with x-Energy.

"Advanced reactors fit squarely into the category of firm, clean energy that the grid increasingly needs," said Patrick White, group lead for fusion energy safety and regulation at the Clean Air Task Force.

White pointed to the Natrium design as being built with renewable integration in mind. He explained how its molten salt system can store energy as heat to help the reactor ramp by hundreds of megawatts, creating a highly flexible asset in a region with heavy investments in wind energy.

Among the largest projects moving ahead is GE Vernova Hitachi's BWRX-300 Clinch River Project with the Tennessee Valley Authority. TVA is currently pursuing a construction permit for one unit, which is expected to be completed in the early 2030s. When fully complete, the site could potentially support more BWRX-300 units, adding firm capacity to the region.

Manu Sivaraman, senior vice president of new nuclear and transmission projects, said pursuing advanced nuclear makes sense for TVA because of its experience with nuclear, partnerships with research institutions, infrastructure and geography, and growing demand in the area. He said the Tennessee Valley has seen consistent annual load growth of about 2% and expects further growth as data centers open and people continue to move to the area.

"We know the demand is there, so using that ecosystem to leverage the next phase of growth is a natural next step," Sivaraman said.

Backing the Momentum

Nichol said that the U.S. is at a pivot point in moving new nuclear from the research and development stage to delivery. This includes regulatory momentum, technology advancement, and broad state and federal support.

Nichol noted how data center developers have been getting involved in power purchase agreements for both advanced nuclear reactors and older facilities. While this support helps, he said measures such as those in the ARC Act, in which the federal government would share cost overruns on projects up to a certain point, are a helpful way of protecting ratepayers and de-risking projects.

> **"If you wait until the technology is fully commercially available to start having these conversations, you're probably going to be behind in terms of deployment."**
>
> **PATRICK WHITE,** GROUP LEAD FOR FUSION ENERGY AND SAFETY, **CLEAN AIR TASK FORCE**

"One of the biggest challenges for utilities to build new nuclear at grid scale is the uncertainty of the costs," said Nichol.

"Predictability of first of its kind is difficult," added Sivaraman.

To help, NEI has been compiling best practices around construction and development, including what steps help mitigate cost impacts.

White pointed to CATF's Nuclear Scaling Initiative, which is similarly working to capture key deployment lessons that will help future builds be more efficient. "If we can improve on the budget and we can improve on the cost as we go from the first unit to the tenth unit, suddenly we're not building first-of-a-kind technologies that have cost overruns and schedule delays, but instead we can deliver nuclear power plant projects that are on time and on budget."

Sivaraman said TVA has a partnership with the entities involved in the Darlington project, which is developing the same BWRX-300 reactor. With that project further ahead in construction, "that allows us to follow a lot of detail and incorporate their lessons learned as we go," he said.

"A lot of the challenges with new nuclear are less about the technology and more about whether the site is ready to adopt any kind of technology," added Sivaraman, noting the importance of having the supporting grid infrastructure and

river system that can handle the cooling system for a reactor. He also stressed how TVA started the siting process years ago to allow for the necessary environmental reviews and monitoring.

Laying the Groundwork

Nichol said NEI's continued efforts to educate the public about nuclear energy, focusing on the facts about safety and used fuel, has led to the public being increasingly supportive of nuclear energy. NEI surveys have found there is more support for nuclear than people realize. "In our public opinion surveys, if you ask people, 'do you support nuclear energy?' The majority say yes. If you ask, 'does your neighbor support nuclear energy?' most people say no. And so it's a misunderstanding of what other people think, largely because we don't talk about it enough."

"Community sentiment here is overwhelmingly positive and filled with curiosity," said Sivaraman, adding how state and local policymakers, including Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, have been part of the effort to talk about the potential economic benefits of the development. Part of the curiosity and education is catching people up with the "layers of safety and regulatory processes" that have advanced in the decades since nuclear plants were last developed.

"You can never be too early with community engagement," added White. "I think there are mistakes that were made historically in a lot of energy projects where you would pick the site first and then start engaging with the community. And what we've really seen is that's not a great way to build public support and public acceptance."

Instead, he noted how developers start explaining the technology and the potential benefits early on, and then have

A marker on location of the Clinch River facility. Photo courtesy Tennessee Valley Authority.

the community weigh in on whether they think it will be a good fit.

"Public support for nuclear is greater near the facility than it is among the general population, and that's because nuclear power is such a good neighbor," said Nichol, pointing to the economic and job benefits as well as environmental stewardship.

With advanced technologies expected to reach commercial readiness in the next five to ten years, White said the time to start assessing community sentiment and engagement is now.

"If you wait until the technology is fully commercially available to start having these conversations, you're probably going to be behind in terms of deployment," said White.

Nichol and White also pointed to the need for long-term regulatory and policy certainty, and regulatory processes that make sense for more modern technology.

"The regulations were really designed in the 1950s and 60s and then evolved for large light water reactors. As we're talking about new nuclear technologies that might use new fuels or new coolants, some of those rules aren't applicable or really aren't appropriate," said White. He noted how the NRC has been working for years to modernize its process to better fit the range of technologies, which has led to the designs advancing today. He sees the next step as ensuring the regulatory process allows for scaling once certain designs are approved, focusing on site-specific considerations rather than re-reviewing technology.

Don't Sleep on Fusion

The next few years might finally put an end to the gibe that fusion generation is perpetually 30 years away from becoming reality. While still in the demonstration phase, development is moving ahead for the necessary permitting, design, and other planning around building fusion facilities in the U.S.

While designs differ, fusion technologies aim to create contained environments where atomic nuclei are joined, releasing energy in the process. White pointed to enabling technologies such as high temperature superconducting magnets, computing, high energy capacitors, materials science, and advanced laser technology as helping move fusion forward within the next decade.

Other signs point to concrete advancements in fusion technology. The Department of Energy created a standalone

> **"If you're a small public power utility and you have a small power need, there is likely an advanced reactor that is sized for that application."**
>
> **MARC NICHOL,** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW NUCLEAR, **NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE**

Office of Fusion as part of a reorganization announced in November 2025, a move to support increased domestic energy production.

TVA is among the entities working with Type One Energy to build a fusion prototype at the former Bull Run Fossil Plant site in Anderson County, Tennessee. The plant ceased its fossil fuel operations in 2023, and TVA and Type One Energy are looking to transform the facility into a 350-MW fusion plant over two phases. Depending on how well the prototype development goes, this effort progresses the research and development of fusion for the United States.

Commonwealth Fusion Systems, a private company based in Massachusetts, has also moved ahead with plans for a nearly 400-MW plant in central Virginia. While CFS still needs to have the SPARC system that the plant would rely on demonstrate energy generation, it is confident enough in its progress that CFS applied for interconnection to PJM in April 2026. CFS expects SPARC to demonstrate net-positive energy in 2027, paving the way for the ARC plant to open in the early 2030s.

CFS' plans for fusion facilities compare them to "the size of a big-box store with about the same site needs." CFS' website notes that its smaller land needs compared to other power generation sources, including wind and solar, "makes it easier to build near areas with heavy power demand, with significantly less development of transmission systems."

While the ARC facility is being self-funded by CFS, it entered a power purchase agreement with Google in June 2025 for the tech giant to purchase 200 MW of ARC's output. CFS is leasing the land for the plant from Dominion Energy.

White also stressed the broad industry and government support needed to help create the conditions for fusion to scale, including developing a fusion-tailored regulatory review process. "For a scientific demonstration machine, where you might have a limited amount of radioactive material or a limited amount of radiation being produced, maybe we can have a simplified regulatory system and simplified regulatory reviews because it doesn't represent any significant hazard to workers, the public, or the environment."

Keep Options Open

Developing plans that don't focus on any one technology also doesn't mean sticking with yesterday's generating mix.

Nichol noted that utilities often still equate nuclear with large reactors, but that advanced technologies will help more utilities be able to consider the right scale and fit for their community. Looking ahead, "it's not a requirement that the only way to get nuclear power is to collaborate with a bigger group to aggregate your loads," he said. "If you're a small public power utility and you have a small power need, there is likely an advanced reactor that is sized for that application."

"It's going to take a balancing act of different energy technologies with different attributes that help us get to the affordable, reliable, clean, secure — throw in your favorite adjective — energy grid that we're going to need in the future," said White. And that means thinking about fission, fusion, and other technologies in development. "It's hard to predict today what technology is going to be best for the utility in 20-35 years, but if you leave those options open, it can maximize your opportunity to hit whatever your energy goals are."

It's also about laying the groundwork for growth and modernization of any kind.

"With time and distance from the previously existing nuclear plants to now, you're also transitioning to a predominantly digitized power plant," said Sivaraman. He stressed that means ensuring IT and other systems are modernized, and that transmission is ready for growth. "To supplement new power generation, you've got to have a transmission interconnection system and transmission system that can handle the growth, otherwise it's a turbine spinning for no good reason."

FROM EFFECTIVE OUTREACH TO BETTER SERVICE

HOW INCORPORATING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK BUILDS TRUST

BY LISA COHN, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

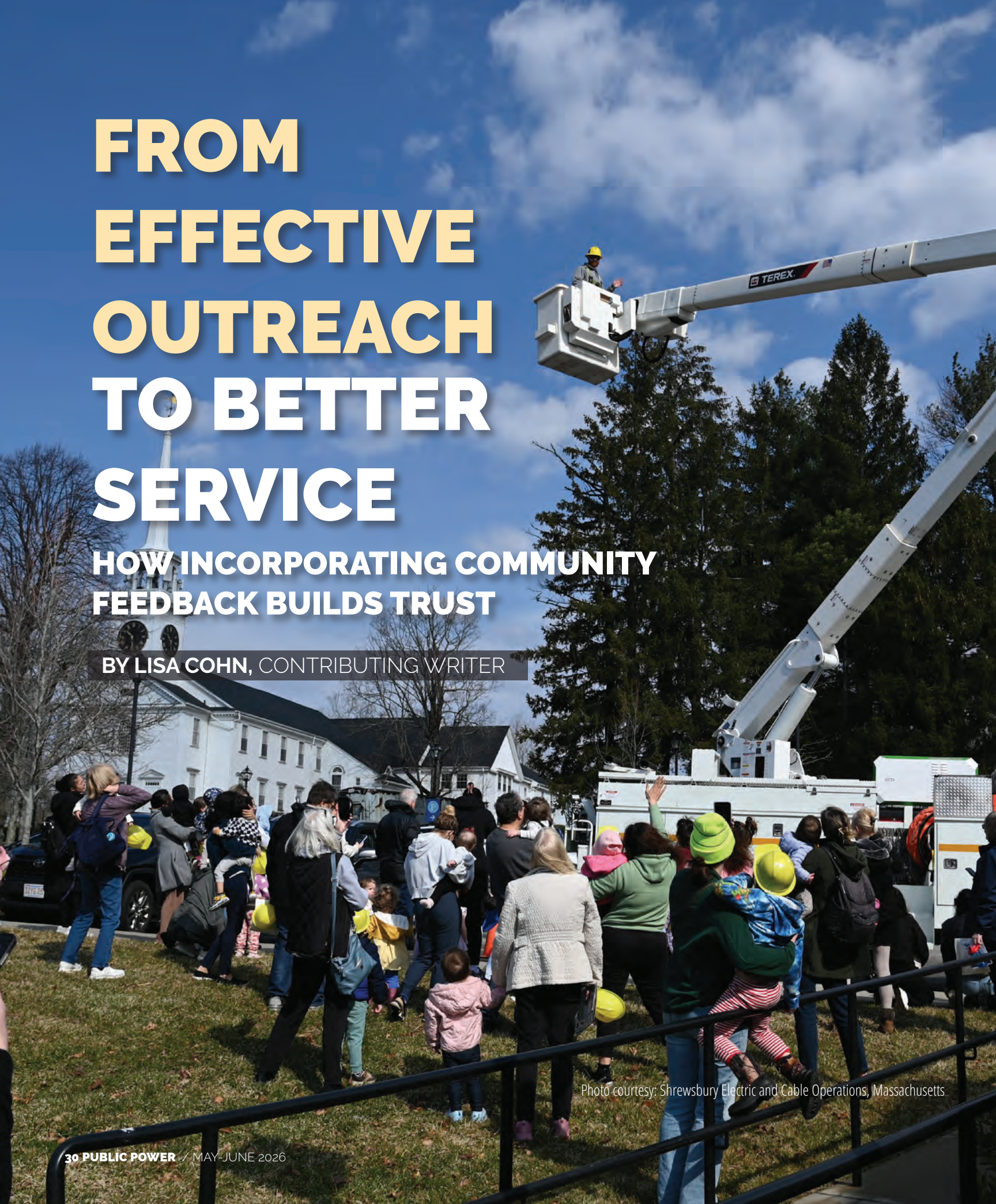
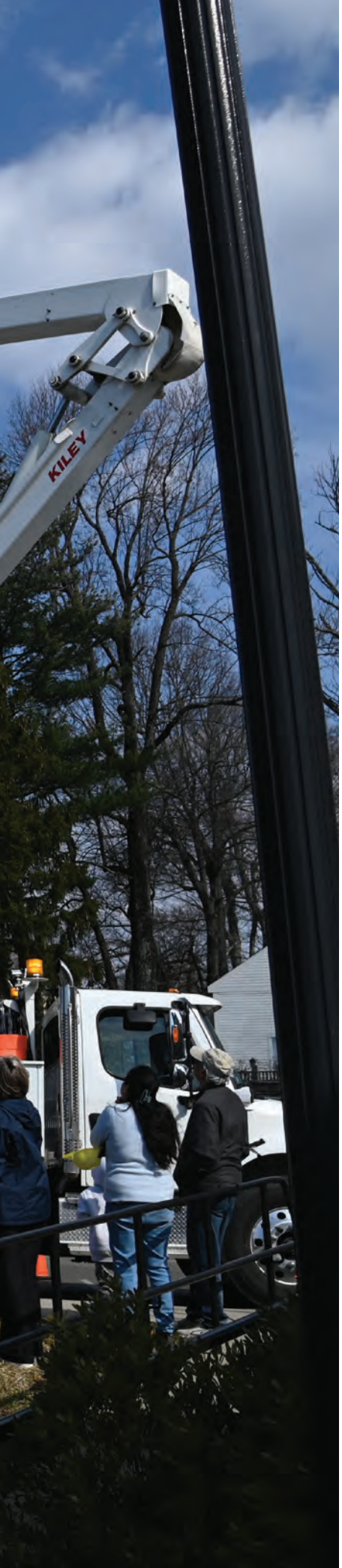


Photo courtesy: Shrewsbury Electric and Cable Operations, Massachusetts



As community-based providers, public power utilities prioritize local connection. A commitment to local service extends beyond delivering reliable electricity across their service areas to ensuring their communication and customer outreach are responsive to customer needs. From ensuring a visible presence in communities to having a listening mindset and focusing on education, public power utilities are strengthening their connections to the community and gaining public trust.

Community Awareness

For several public power utilities, establishing a strong community presence begins with a concerted effort to distinguish themselves as local, non-profit providers, instead of the corporations customers often assume utilities are.

"Our message, our whole business model is to be community-powered," said Valerie Clemmey, marketing and communications manager at Shrewsbury Electric & Cable Operations in Massachusetts. "We're here for the community."

SELCO and many other public power utilities are taking creative approaches designed to reach all customers — and strengthen feedback loops. These have included age-tailored initiatives such as creating calendars of fourth grade students' artwork about energy efficiency and other topics, teaching electrical safety in schools, launching community volunteer programs for employees, offering internships to local high schoolers, and sending newsletters.

SELCO's community events aim to reach customers of all ages and demographics. They include story time at the local library for kids and parents. At another event, utility personnel demonstrate to children and their parents what it's like to be a lineworker, including showing and letting them touch SELCO's bucket truck.

At local middle and high schools, SELCO attends career fairs to give students a sense of the different roles they could serve at the utility. The fair helps SELCO develop a close connection to the community and demonstrates investment and accountability. SELCO also visits fourth grade classrooms to teach children about electric safety.

For Middleborough Gas and Electric Department in Massachusetts, initiatives have included a drawing contest designed to reach both children and their parents, said Dani Taylor, energy services/communications supervisor at MGED.

The utility begins by showing fourth graders line trucks, explaining the role of lineworkers, and giving students an hourlong presentation on safety, efficiency, and other issues. MGED also sends the children home with materials about these programs to share with their parents. The utility then asks students to participate in a drawing contest

Customers and key stakeholders get a tour of PWC's Butler-Warner Generation Plant during PWC Day. Photo courtesy Fayetteville Public Works Commission.

about what they've learned. Thirteen drawings are chosen for the calendar — one for each month plus the winner, which is featured on the cover.

The colorful drawings from the kids convey energy efficiency measures and how to stay safe around natural gas and power lines.

"We tie in a lot of education about public power utilities — that we're community owned, reliable, and affordable," Taylor said. "We also show them that as they grow up, if there's an interest, they could work right here for us in their town."

Parents say their children talk more about this program than anything else they've learned at school, Taylor said.

MGED also offers internship programs for juniors and seniors in high school, with some of these interns later being hired for full-time jobs. The cooperative internship program, offered through Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School, was designed to develop partnerships between industry and vocational/technical education institutions to enhance the employability of high school students.

MGED recently rolled out an employee volunteer program that helps the utility further connect with the community. For her part, Taylor plans to volunteer at the local animal shelter and walk dogs to take advantage of the four-hour volunteer program.

Community events are another way MGED sustains visibility with its customers. When the utility attends or organizes community events, it shares information about rebate programs for Energy Star appliances, battery-powered lawn equipment, weatherization, heat pumps, EV chargers, and solar power. The utility also spreads the word about these programs in quarterly bill stuffers and electronic newsletters.

Taylor said the message MGED wants to share is, "We are here for the community. We're reliable, safe, affordable, and it's special to have a public power company in your community."

Refining Strategy

Being a prominent local institution that touches all parts of the community can lead to an abundance of requests that take away from the primary focus of the utility's services.

For Fayetteville Public Works Commission in North Carolina, it recently reexamined its outreach strategies when

"We really like doing any kind of event where we can get face-to-face time with our customers, because that's really some of the best opportunities that we have to talk with them about whatever issues they're having or if they don't understand how something works."

NICOLE STIFF, COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGER,
FAYETTEVILLE PUBLIC WORKS COMMISSION, NORTH CAROLINA

its chief executive officer challenged the utility to take a hard look at how effective its communications and community events were, said Nicole Stiff, community relations manager at Fayetteville PWC.

"We started asking ourselves, 'Why are we doing these things? Do these things really serve PWC and its customers?'" she said. The team members felt they had boxed themselves into a rigid way of thinking about how they communicated with customers and held community events.

Before this change, the team rarely turned down invitations, she said. The utility decided to become more strategic about when to say yes, including when to give out sponsorship dollars.

The community relations team now explains upfront why the utility might attend an event and focuses on ensuring the event accomplishes the utility's goals. In addition, community relations personnel seek data points to demonstrate how certain events benefit the community and utility.

Photo courtesy Middleborough Gas and Electric, Massachusetts

Fayetteville PWC developed criteria for events and entities requesting sponsorship dollars, saying it will participate in or support "activities and events that advance both a public purpose and the objectives of Fayetteville PWC." The utility also created a request form outlining various ways it can support the community.

After implementing those changes, the utility's sponsorships have included Fayetteville Dogwood Festival, the town's minor league baseball team, and a minor league hockey team, plus an event for Habitat for Humanity.

For the Dogwood Festival sponsorship, Fayetteville PWC's brand is displayed in all event advertising and promotions. The public power utility also has a tent where it hands out water and fans to attendees.

"We really like doing any kind of event where we can get face-to-face time with our customers, because that's really some of the best opportunities that we have to talk with them about whatever issues they're having or if they don't understand how something works," Stiff said.

At these events, Fayetteville PWC distributes information about its incentive programs, which help fund efficiency upgrades that can save customers money.

PWC Day, which occurs twice a year, is also an impactful community event, Stiff said. Designed to provide education and engagement, build transparency, and foster trust, it offers a behind-the-scenes look at how the public power utility operates. The October event has a theme focused on electricity, and events include a tour of the utility's generation and operations complex, live demonstrations by lineworkers, and question-and-answer panels with staff members.

"I feel passionate about the public power model, working for a utility, and showcasing its benefits to the community. It's a really special thing that we shouldn't take for granted."

DANI TAYLOR, ENERGY SERVICES/COMMUNICATIONS SUPERVISOR,
MIDDLEBOROUGH GAS AND ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT, MASSACHUSETTS

Prioritizing Feedback

SELCO has 20 events scheduled for 2026, including an Arbor Day event and an open house. At the April Arbor Day event, SELCO gave customers 500 native trees — all purchased from a local business — and explained how properly placed trees can help lower bills by reducing air conditioning costs.

"We really like to put our faces out there and connect with people at the Arbor Day event, and it's really enjoyable," Clemmey said.

The annual open house gives customers an opportunity to get a direct window into the utility's operation areas and how it serves the community. At the same time, it gives SELCO a chance to answer customers' questions about priority areas.

The event, which has grown every year, includes tours of a substation, kids' activities, information about advanced metering infrastructure, and, for the first time, test drives of electric vehicles.

SELCO is a two-time Public Power Customer Satisfaction Award winner, which recognizes utilities that receive top marks from customers on overall service, communication, response, and more. Clemmey is presenting at APPA's National Conference in June on the strategies and operational priorities that have supported SELCO's continued top marks.

Part of that effort is ensuring a proactive, responsive approach to customer concerns, which leads to fewer complaints and questions, she said.

"Some customers are concerned about AMI meters and possible radiation and data privacy issues," Clemmey gave as one example. The utility provides information on its website, in person, and through one-on-one conversations that reassures customers about how AMI advances service quality and doesn't have harmful effects.

Other events and information are structured around another area of interest in the community: electrification.

Last year, Shrewsbury had the highest number of EV drivers in Massachusetts, aided by SELCO's efficacy in communicating about electrification, rebate offers for EVs and EV chargers, and publicizing its installation of four local charging stations.

"We definitely focus on electrification every chance that we get," Clemmey said.

The utility has also held one-off events, such as induction cooking demonstrations and a heat pump forum, to teach customers about the benefits of electrification.

SELCO has also expanded its communication channels to include both a printed quarterly newsletter delivered to customers' homes and an email newsletter sent to customers who request it.

"Our messaging really hones in on the public power utility model and really stresses the difference that we have compared to investor-owned utilities," Clemmey said.

The printed newsletter mailed to customers has proved to be a highly effective way to share information about the utility and its programs.

"There's just so much digital communication these days. When you know that it's actually going where you want it to go — to every home and business in our town — I think that's really a good way to get out there these days," she said.

All opportunities to connect with the community help build pride in the utility and showcase the responsive nature of the public power model.

As MGED's Taylor said, "I love working for a public power utility with coworkers and the community. I feel passionate about the public power model, working for a utility, and showcasing its benefits to the community. It's a really special thing that we shouldn't take for granted."

Public Power Leaders: **Ed Liberty**

Ed Liberty has served as electric utilities director of Lake Worth Beach Utilities in Florida since 2017. His career in the utilities sector began at PSE&G in 1981 and continued through tenures at NUI Corporation, where he focused on natural gas development projects, and as a member of Dome-Tech, a consultancy that specialized in energy efficiency and energy procurement management. Liberty holds a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the Newark College of Engineering and was a 2025 recipient of the American Public Power Association's Mark Crisson Leadership and Managerial Excellence Award.

What brought you to work in public power, and how has working in public power been different than your corporate experience?

I got my degree in engineering and started in power plant operations doing boots-on-the-ground maintenance and repair before rising through the ranks into power generation management at the corporate level. I also worked in an energy services consultancy, Dome-Tech, which allowed me to work extensively with large industrial customers on energy master plans, solar projects, and energy procurement. I was fortunate to work and learn from outstanding utility and business leaders and brought those lessons with me to Lake Worth Beach when the opportunity arose for me to lead the electric utility through what became a major transition to lower rates and improve reliability.

It has definitely been a shift in terms of adjusting perspective on how things get done and how involved the public is in the decisions that you make compared to the way things are managed in the investor-owned world. Many of the processes are the same on a technical level. When you're repairing a piece of equipment or planning and building new infrastructure, it doesn't matter whether you're in public power or an investor-owned utility, the skill sets you need are the same. Where things begin to change is who you communicate with and are accountable to. In public power, the community has a lot of opportunities and ability to be much more closely involved in understanding how you're making decisions, the basis for these decisions, and what it's going to cost.

How would you describe your leadership philosophy?

My philosophy has evolved over my career and has been shaped by years of working under tremendous leaders. It's one I've adapted for my time here to be especially collaborative and focused on recognizing the skill sets and experience of your employees and understanding both their capabilities and interest areas.

It helps to set up staff into swim lanes where they can have clarity of focus and purpose to excel in their specific roles and then organize them around the broader goals you want to achieve. One of the things I discovered at Lake Worth Beach is there is a lot more talent and knowledge in the organization than people appreciated, and you want to empower your staff to use that expertise to make the right decisions.

What have been your proudest achievements at Lake Worth Beach?

The first things I focused on were cost and reliability. We buy wholesale power and distribute it through our system to our customers at the retail level. We exist financially in that space between the wholesale price and the retail price, and we achieved some significant potential savings through reviewing and renegotiating our wholesale power contracts. We also looked very closely at where we could create some operational savings beyond the reduction in wholesale power costs and created new revenues not by raising rates but by enforcing decades-long contracts that had not been properly managed.

Another big piece was cutting expenses in ways that have helped us build long-term savings. Sustainable cost reductions allow us to issue long-term debt in the form of revenue bonds dedicated to capital investments for infrastructure improvements, which then brings down outage rates and improves overall reliability. We had to create the vision, show how it could be funded, execute the projects, and use data to measure the improvements. The community trusted us and we're delivering the results they were counting on.

We created an outage management system that combined SCADA system data, AMI data, and incoming customer phone calls that allowed us to determine which meters were out, diagnose the problem, and dispatch crews more efficiently.

I asked our team to consider what it would take to improve our system along those lines. They spent a couple of months coming up with ideas that evolved into a $140 million reliability improvement program that began in 2017. The initial two to three years saw slower progress, but by 2021 we began to see measurable improvement across all our service reliability metrics. This has also been reflected in what customers say in public about how much better things are today compared to prior years, which has played a big role in building team morale.

What are you looking to accomplish at Lake Worth Beach going forward?

Our focus is growing from continuous reliability improvements to sustaining what we've achieved. I've talked with both our team and the public about this next phase, in which they will see us grow our preventive and predictive maintenance programs. We have hundreds of new devices out in the field and now have to maintain them properly. We're also still building new substations, one of which is almost completed, and what we call a new sub-transmission backbone, which will make the system even more reliable.

I'm also working with our team on rotational and promotional assignments to build institutional knowledge and staff skills so we can have continuity and sustainability of performance when our senior leadership, me included, retire someday. Ensuring we have sustainably reliable operations is an obligation we have to our community, and one I want to make sure is lined up with foresight and the resources to keep it going.

A group of firefighters at a training in Cartersville, Georgia.

Strengthening Substation Safety

How MEAG Power's Hands-On Security Training Prepares Responders for Growing Threats

BY RENE COWART, SENIOR TRAINING AND SAFETY SPECIALIST, MEAG POWER

As attacks on electric infrastructure have been on the rise, MEAG Power saw the need for law enforcement officers and other first responders to understand how to safely respond to physical security incidents at substations across its participant communities in Georgia.

Since launching our SAFER training program in 2024, we've trained more than 600 emergency responders in 24 of the 49 communities MEAG Power serves.

The program gives local law enforcement and fire departments an in-depth understanding of safety in and around electrical substations. The aim is to ensure that responders know how to recognize when there has been an incident and follow substation safety protocol to remain safe when on the premises.

The program is open to all emergency responders to substations in the participant community, including line crews, utility staff, firefighters, and law enforcement officers. For law enforcement, the training also counts towards credit hours they need for their annual Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training certification.

Each training consists of both classroom instruction and an onsite tour of a local substation to learn about substation equipment and relevant safety and security information. Every training is customized for the participant community and specific to substations in the area.

One of the most eye-opening parts of the training has been for the trainees to learn about recent unlawful events and the statistics on growing threats to electric infrastructure, whether through physical entry or from other threats such as drones or weapons. This includes learning what kind of threat information, and even attack plans, regularly appears on the dark web. Each training offers the most up-to-date statistics to reflect the latest threats.

MEAG Power is able to adapt each training as we are already familiar with the participant communities and engage with lineworkers through other trainings. We are very familiar with the substations across our participant communities and what equipment they have. In preparation for each training, we can often pull photos from our archive to review a specific community's assets and tailor the content.

We've conducted multiple classes back-to-back in the same community, training as many as 100 officers in the same week. However, individual classes are kept small to keep the training effective, so this has meant sometimes holding one class in the morning and one in the afternoon.

MEAG Power's goal is to provide the training to all of our participant communities over five years. Now in year three, our aim is to conduct one training per month to keep pace with the goal and the demand for the training. There is no minimum class size, so even if a participant community only has a few people they'd like to train, we'll run the class for them. We've also done trainings that combined participants from multiple communities. Some trainees have included county representatives.

Feedback from participants in the program so far has been positive. Two communities have already re-trained or included additional staff to ensure all responders are prepared.

Our goal is to make first responders aware of how substations are used and how they can be targets of attacks. We keep eyes and ears open on the available information out there in an effort to keep our trainees as updated as possible and include as much as we can. We not only want to be sure responders are aware of vulnerabilities, we want to ensure they have the confidence to safely respond to any incidents.

As we look to how we can continue to enhance the trainings, we are tracking what threats are possible from the latest technology and thinking about what else first responders might want to know to support a seamless response. We're glad to have seen the positive response to date, affirming the broad commitment across communities for a secure grid.

WHAT IS CYBER MUTUAL ASSISTANCE?

Similar to mutual aid following major storms and other events, utilities can get help from peers and other utilities following cyber incidents. For 10 years, the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council's Cyber Mutual Assistance program has brought together public power, co-ops, investor-owned utilities, and natural gas companies to share knowledge and offer support with the aim of improving collective defense.

Whether putting out a request for aid or providing support, utilities can choose when — and in what ways — they participate in the program.

Join

Public power utilities can sign up for no cost in "blue sky" times, either through the ESCC or APPA.

- **Designate a CMA coordinator at your utility**
- **Sign and return a mutual non-disclosure agreement**

Get Resources

New participants gain access to playbooks and cyber tools upon joining.

Information Sharing

Get alerts from fellow members about cyber incidents, giving advanced warning of possible threats.

Attend Briefings

CMA staff host briefings on geopolitical events and emerging threats.

Request Assistance

Utilities can put out a request for emergency assistance (following an incident), or for other support to proactively boost their cybersecurity.

Sign up for the program at www.PublicPower.org/Participate-Cyber-Mutual-Assistance

Offer Advice or Help

Other program participants can choose to offer their fellow members services, personnel, and equipment.

Recipients of emergency cyber assistance reimburse supporting members for relevant costs and expenses.

CYBERSECURITY ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

Helping public power evaluate and improve cybersecurity maturity

The Cybersecurity Accelerator Program helps public power utilities assess and strengthen their cybersecurity programs across four core areas:

- Internal controls
- Cybersecurity governance and training
- Cyber incident response
- Cyber risk management

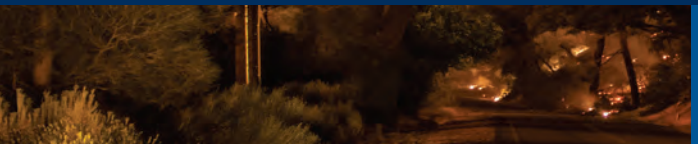
Strengthen Practices, Get Recognized

Completing the CAP assessment can help utilities identify core cybersecurity practices needing attention. Utilities with more mature programs can receive formal recognition from APPA as CAP designees.

Learn more at www.PublicPower.org/CAP

AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

Powering Strong Communities



RESILIENT STRUCTURES
FOR A RELIABLE GRID

WHEN FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION, UTILITIES RELY ON RS ENGINEERED COMPOSITE POLES

The reliability of the world's electric power grid is tested time and again by extreme weather, challenging remote locations, or the use of inferior materials for supporting critical structures and circuits. These events can disrupt communities, compromise infrastructure, and leavemillions without power. Each disruption underscores how essential it is to maintain strong, resilient connections.

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