

PSC: Wisconsin to tackle broadband connectivity and energy transition in the new year

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The beginning of the year is always a time to reflect on the previous year and plan for the new one. As Chairperson of the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC or Commission), I am excited for the year ahead and ask for your continued collaboration as we tackle the important issues of digital access and affordability; energy efficiency and innovation; and infrastructure decisions faced by our state's gas, electric, and water utilities.

With the pandemic impacting our daily lives and the increased reliance of schools and businesses on the internet, the PSC will continue fighting for reliable high-speed internet for unserved and underserved communities. The Governor and I look forward to building on the successes of the last four years and we have no intentions of slowing down now.

Altogether, since Governor Evers took office, the Commission has awarded grants to projects that will provide access to new or improved broadband service for more than 300,000 locations. Last year alone, Governor Evers allocated more than \$105 million in federal pandemic funding to the PSC for broadband expansion. The PSC awarded that funding to projects in more than 42 counties and three tribal communities. In addition, the 2021-23 state budget provided \$129 million for the state's Broadband Expansion Grant Program. The Commission is currently accepting grant applications for this funding until March 17, 2022, and we anticipate making the grant awards this summer.

Along with our efforts to eliminate the digital divide, we are taking major steps in 2022 to address the transition in the energy industry. Our energy sources are

shifting from fossil fuels to zero carbon sources. The Commission has approved the construction or acquisition of 18 utility-scale solar power generating plants, which will add over 2,100 megawatts of zero-carbon generation to the state's electrical grid. Already in 2022 the Commission has six solar projects under review that total an additional 614 megawatts of clean generation. At the PSC, we work diligently to ensure this transition will be done safely, reliably, and affordably for all Wisconsinites regardless of zip code or income.

The Roadmap to Zero Carbon docket the PSC opened last year will allow us to explore ways to optimize the benefits of the transition for all customers. We are considering stakeholder feedback, recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, and our state's largest utilities' shared goals of 100% electricity consumed in Wisconsin to be carbon-free by 2050. Our first event as an agency in 2022 is a collaborative workshop and panel discussion regarding performance-based utility regulation, which the public is invited to attend.

Wisconsin has a lot at stake, including achieving digital equity and energy justice, and repairing aging water infrastructure, all while keeping the lights and heat on and affordable. As you and your families continue to manage your way through this pandemic, the PSC will continue to work to lower the energy burden, increase awareness for energy assistance programs and opportunities, and encourage public participation in the decision-making process.

I encourage you to visit the Public Service Commission website at www.psc.wi.gov to stay informed of our progress, and I hope your 2022 will be as productive as ours.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the PSC or any other individual Commissioner.