

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Date: February 17, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Place: Commissioners Room, Courthouse, Caledonia, MN

Members Present: Cindy Wright, Eric Johnson, Robert Schuldt, and Greg Myhre

Others Present: Interim Auditor/Treasurer Polly Heberlein, Fillmore County Journal Reporter Charlene Selbee, The Caledonia Argus Associate Editor Katia Gorsuch, Finance Director Carol Lapham, Coordinator Brent Parker, EDA Director & Coordinator Support Allison Wagner, Financial Assistance Supervisor Karen Kohlmeyer, Fiscal Supervisor Heidi Harms, Social Services Supervisor Bethany Moen, Engineer Brian Pogodzinski, Highway Maintenance Foreman Jordan Goeden, Larry Gaustad, Sheila Schroeder, Charlie Wray, Deb Wray, Dairyland Power Cooperative System Planning & Operations Director Steve Porter, Dairyland Power Cooperative Substation Engineer Clay Dewitt, Dairyland Power Stakeholder Communications, Engagement & Key Projects Manager Eric Jacobson, Dairyland Power Sr. Project Manager; Transmission Projects Dylan Alitz and Dairyland Power Staff Attorney Rob Maly

Presiding: Chairperson Myhre

Call to order.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion was made by Commissioner Zehnder, seconded by Commissioner Wright, motion unanimously carried to approve the agenda.

Motion was made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Schuldt, motion carried unanimously to approve the meeting minutes from February 3, 2026.

Motion was made by Commissioner Zehnder, seconded by Commissioner Wright, motion carried unanimously to approve the meeting minutes from the special meeting on February 4, 2026.

Motion was made by Commissioner Wright, seconded by Commissioner Schuldt, motion carried to approve the meeting minutes from the workgroup session on February 10, 2026. All Commissioners voted yes, except for Commissioner Johnson who abstained due to being absent from the meeting.

Public Comment:

Sheila Schroeder from Wilmington Township thanked the board for listening to her and the group with concerns about the MariBell Transmission Line. She said the proposed resolution opposing the project in Houston County had all the parts the group had wanted. She highly encouraged the board to vote for the resolution opposing the project.

APPOINTMENTS

None.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Wright moved, Commissioner Zehnder seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve the consent agenda. Approved items are below.

- 1) Hire Christine Novak as a 1 FTE Accounting Clerk (B22 – Step 4) with a start date of February 23rd, 2026.
- 2) Hire Lynn Buhl as a 1 FTE Child Support Officer (B24 – Step 4) with a start date of March 2nd, 2026.
- 3) Transfer Dianna Kerns from Social Worker to a 1 FTE Child Protection Social Worker (Lateral Transfer / C41 – Step 4) effective immediately.
- 4) Approve a competitive search for a 1 FTE Social Worker (C41).
- 5) Award the renting of the two areas of land at the airport to the highest bidders and approve land agreements. (Separate agreements for the 5.59 acres and the 17.63 acres.) Abstracts are below.

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
 Airport Crop Land Abstract
 Runway Acres Bid
 February 4, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.

				Burg's LLC Jamison and Jeni Burg		Johnathon Glasspoole	
Line	Item	Qty	Unit	Unit Price	Total Price	Unit Price	Total Price
1	Airport Crop Land Rental - Runway	17.63	Acres	\$151.00	\$2,662.13	\$125.00	\$2,203.75
HIGH BID		17.63	Acres	\$151.00	\$2,662.13		

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
 Airport Crop Land Abstract
 Hangar Acres Bid
 February 4, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.

				Jeremy Burt		Nick Hoscheit		Johnathon Glasspoole	
Line	Item	Qty	Unit	Unit Price	Total Price	Unit Price	Total Price	Unit Price	Total Price
1	Airport Crop Land Rental - Hangar	5.59	Acres	\$230.00	\$1,285.70	\$208.00	\$1,162.72	\$125.00	\$698.75
HIGH BID		5.59	Acres	\$230.00	\$1,285.70				

ACTION ITEMS

File No. 1 – Prior to any motions being made the Commissioners discussed the proposed Resolution No. 26-08 A Resolution of the Houston County Board of Commissioners Opposing the Proposed 765 kV “Gopher to Badger Link” Transmission Project Within Houston County, Minnesota. Commissioner Wright suggested adding some further language into the resolution being considered to make it more specific. Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Johnson seconded, motion unanimously carried to adopt Resolution No. 26-08 A Resolution of the Houston County Board of Commissioners Opposing the Proposed 765 kV “Gopher to Badger Link” Transmission Project Within Houston County, Minnesota with the suggested edits. The Commissioners voted by roll. All Commissioners voted yes. The final resolution is below.

RESOLUTION NO. 26-08

A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OPPOSING THE PROPOSED 765 kV “GOPHER TO BADGER LINK” TRANSMISSION PROJECT WITHIN HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA

WHEREAS, Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, and Dairyland Power Cooperative (collectively, “Applicants”) have filed a Joint Application with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (“MPUC”) for a Certificate of Need (MPUC Docket No. ET3, E002/CN-25-121) for the Gopher to Badger Link Project, which includes approximately 105 miles of 765 kV/161 kV double-circuit transmission line extending to the Minnesota/Wisconsin border and a new three-circuit 161 kV switching station proposed within Houston County; and

WHEREAS, According to the Application, Segment 2 structures would typically range from approximately 150 to 199 feet in height, spaced approximately 1,200 to 1,500 feet apart, and require up to an approximately 250-foot-wide right-of-way; and

WHEREAS, The Application estimates total project costs between approximately \$979 million and \$1.273 billion (2024 dollars), and states the facilities would be placed in service by the end of 2034; and

WHEREAS, The Application states that the Project was approved by MISO as part of its Long-Range Transmission Planning (LRTP) Tranche 2.1 portfolio and is designed to address regional reliability, economic, and generation transition objectives; and

WHEREAS, Minnesota Statutes § 216B.243 and Minnesota Rules Chapter 7849 require that a Certificate of Need may only be granted if, by a preponderance of the evidence, the proposed facility will provide benefits to society in a manner compatible with protecting the

natural and socioeconomic environments, including human health, and that the project will comply with relevant local policies and regulations; and

WHEREAS, Houston County has adopted its Comprehensive Land Use Plan by ordinance, which recognizes:

1. The cultural and economic importance of agriculture,
2. The preservation of scenic bluffs, valleys, and natural landscapes,
3. The protection of environmentally sensitive areas,
4. The priority of natural resource protection over large-scale infrastructure expansion; and

WHEREAS, Houston County lies within Minnesota's Blufflands and Driftless Area, characterized by steep slopes, karst topography, trout streams, agricultural production lands, tourism-based economies, and significant scenic resources; and

WHEREAS, The proposed Project would introduce the largest alternating current transmission voltage currently operating in the United States (765 kV) into Houston County, including a double-circuit configuration with a 161 kV line beneath the 765 kV circuit; and

WHEREAS, The Application acknowledges potential impacts including electric and magnetic fields (EMF), noise, corona discharge, agricultural disruption, and environmental impacts, but long-term localized effects on Houston County's agricultural economy, property values, and tourism-dependent landscape remain disputed and unresolved; and

WHEREAS, Houston County residents, landowners, and agricultural producers have expressed significant concerns including but not limited to:

1. Potential human health impacts.
2. EMF exposure.
3. Audible noise and corona effects.
4. Stray voltage.
5. Agricultural land fragmentation and loss of productivity.
6. Potential loss of homes and farms.
7. Property value depreciation.
8. Visual and aesthetic impacts to the Blufflands landscape.
9. Wildlife and livestock impacts.
10. Tourism impacts.
11. Eminent domain concerns.
12. Road damage and construction impacts.
13. Adequacy of public engagement and transparency.
14. Whether the Project delivers demonstrable, direct benefit to Houston County residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

Section 1. Opposition

The Houston County Board of Commissioners formally opposes the proposed routing of the 765 kV Gopher to Badger Link transmission facilities within Houston County unless and until it is conclusively demonstrated through the MPUC process that:

1. The Project is the least-impactful alternative, and is explicitly proven to provide Houston County residents with direct benefits.
2. No reasonable lower-voltage or non-wires alternatives exist.
3. The Project fully complies with Houston County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
4. Local environmental, agricultural, and socioeconomic impacts are minimized to the maximum extent practicable.

Section 2. Environmental and Local Review

Houston County formally requests:

1. A full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and mitigation plan with local review that includes Houston County-specific agricultural, karst, groundwater, wildlife, scenic, tourism, and property value analyses.
2. Detailed modeling of EMF, audible noise, and corona discharge at residential setbacks.
3. Independent Agricultural Impact Assessment specific to Blufflands soils and topography.
4. Full disclosure of anticipated right-of-way acquisition impacts within the County.
5. Early sharing of the Route Permit Application prior to formal filing.

Section 3. Information Requested from Applicants

Houston County requests that the Applicants provide, in written and publicly accessible form on or before April 30th, 2026:

1. A breakdown of cost allocation by state and rate class.
2. Documentation of Minnesota residential rate impacts resulting from this project projected over 1, 10, and 20 years.
3. A list of specific quantified economic benefits projected for Houston County.
4. Detailed alternative route analysis considered for Houston County.
5. Documentation of distributed energy resource assumptions used in load forecasts (Years 1, 10, and 20).
6. A list of prior combined 765 kV / 161 kV double-circuit installations constructed by the Applicants.
7. Detailed site criteria and footprint for the proposed Houston County switching station.
8. Road use agreements, construction practices, and infrastructure protection commitments to minimize risk and damages.
9. A clear explanation of eminent domain authority and compensation standards.

Section 4. Preservation of Local Authority

Houston County asserts its right to:

1. Participate as a party in MPUC proceedings,
2. Submit formal comments and expert testimony,
3. Protect its Comprehensive Land Use Plan,
4. Advocate for agricultural land preservation,
5. Protect the Blufflands landscape and tourism economy,
6. Protect residents' property rights.

Section 5. Transmission of Resolution

The County Coordinator is directed to transmit this Resolution to:

1. Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
2. Minnesota Department of Commerce
3. Xcel Energy
4. Dairyland Power Cooperative
5. MISO
6. The Governor of Minnesota

File No. 2 – Prior to any motions being made the Commissioners discussed with Coordinator Parker the possibility of adopting Resolution No. 26-09 A Resolution Separating Public Health and Human Services Into Two Distinct County Departments. Coordinator Parker said in looking at other counties who had combined Public Health and Human Services he was seeing a trend of the two departments being separated once again. The State would need to be notified of the separation. Commissioner Wright said the two departments would still work together like they currently did. She said all departments should be linked to one another. Commissioner Zehnder said he wanted to make sure the departments were comfortable with the plan to separate. Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Wright seconded, motion unanimously carried to adopt Resolution No. 26-09 A Resolution Separating Public Health and Human Services Into Two Distinct County Departments. The Commissioners vote by roll. All Commissioners voted yes. Resolution is below.

RESOLUTION NO. 26-09

A RESOLUTION SEPARATING PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES INTO TWO DISTINCT COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

WHEREAS, the County Board is responsible for establishing the administrative structure of county government to promote effective governance, accountability, and service delivery; and

WHEREAS, the County currently operates Public Health and Human Services as a combined department; and

WHEREAS, the County Board has determined that separating Public Health and Human Services into two distinct departments will improve organizational clarity, operational efficiency, and administrative oversight; and

WHEREAS, the County Board further desires to clarify the organizational placement of the Finance Division to ensure clear lines of authority and fiscal accountability,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

Separation of Departments

Effective February 17th, 2026, the existing Public Health and Human Services Department shall start to be officially separated into two distinct county departments:

- Public Health Department
- Human Services Department

Departmental Authority

Each department shall operate independently under its respective statutory authority, leadership, and administrative structure, subject to County Board approval.

Fiscal Services Placement

The Fiscal Services shall be positioned within the county's organizational structure with administrative oversight.

Administrative Implementation

County administration is authorized and directed to take all necessary actions to implement this organizational change, including updates to organizational charts, job descriptions, internal policies, and administrative systems.

File No. 3 – Commissioner Johnson moved, Commissioner Zehnder seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve contract with Ability Building Community (ABC).

File No. 4 – Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Johnson seconded, motion carried to approve purchase of Recycling Truck, 2026 Western Star 47X Palfinger HT 500 hook truck. This would also include an additional five year warranty.

File No. 5 – Commissioner Johnson moved, Commissioner Schuldt seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve cooperative agreement detailing agency responsibilities with the City of Houston regarding project SAP 028-013-013 located within the City of Houston.

File No. 6 – Commissioners discussed individual purchases recommended below. These items had been budgeted.

- a. Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Wright seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve Plow Truck Chassis: Dave Syverson Truck Center for the 2027 Western Star.
- b. Commissioner Johnson moved, Commissioner Schuldt seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve Plow Truck Chassis: Towmaster for Swenson Body.
- c. The purchase of a Skid Steer was tabled.
- d. Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Wright seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve purchasing Mulching Head: Diamond Mowers for the 72" Drum Mulcher with Drum Brake
- e. Commissioner Johnson moved, Commissioner Zehnder seconded, motion unanimously carried to approve purchasing Mowers: Hammell Equipment for 2 - Vermeer 5050 Mowers.

Approved bids are below:

Houston County Highway Department
2026 Equipment

Agenda Item	Dave Syverson Truck Centers 2027 Western Star 47X Tandem Chassis Sourcewell Bid	Nuss Truck & Equipment 2027 Mack Granite 64FR MN Coop Purchase bid
Plow Truck Chassis	163,556.00	165,799.92

Agenda Item	Towmaster Swenson Body MN Coop Purchase Bid
Plow Truck Box	217,462.00

Agenda Item	Contains a Drum Brake	
	Diamond Mowers 72" Drum Mulcher MN State Contract 269767	RDO Equipment Fecon 72"
Mulching Head		
	\$ 49,950.00	\$ 50,983.66

Agenda Item	Hammell Equipment Vermeer 5050
Mowers x 2 - \$13,450.00 each	\$ 26,900.00

File No. 7 – Commissioner Zehnder moved, Commissioner Johnson seconded, motion unanimously carried to review and approve payments. Payments are below.

REVIEW LICENSE CENTER PAYMENTS

2026/02/05 AUDITOR WARRANTS:

VENDOR NAME	AMOUNT
DELTA DENTAL	7,994.98
IUOE LOCAL 49 FRINGE BENEFIT FUNDS	28,475.00
MEDICA	256,381.82
MN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY	2,663.76
	295,515.56
7 VENDORS PAID LESS THAN \$2000.00	3,252.71
	<u>298,768.27</u>

REQUEST APPROVAL FOR PAYMENTS

2026/02/17 COMMISSIONER WARRANTS:

VENDOR NAME	AMOUNT
ACENTEK	4,303.94
ADVANCED CORRECTIONAL HEALTHCARE	8,112.33
ANCOM COMMUNICATIONS	9,678.60
BENJEGERDES MACHINE INC	6,341.63
CALEDONIA OIL CO INC	4,720.00
CALEDONIA/CITY OF	13,401.85
COMPUTER FORENSIC SERVICES LLC	48,301.41
CONSOLIDATED ENERGY COMPANY	4,934.08
EHLERS	3,150.00
GREAT LAKES SALT COMPANY	26,497.37
GROUND BREAKING CONNECTIONS LLC	7,083.33
HOKAH CO-OP OIL ASSN	4,427.89
HOUSTON COUNTY TREASURER	23,470.03
INTERSTATE BILLING SERVICES	4,635.89
LIBERTY TIRE RECYCLING LLC	4,010.00
MASTER'S TOUCH INC/THE	8,000.00
MINNESOTA ENERGY RESOURCES	13,380.58
MN STATE TREASURER	3,303.00
NATIONAL TANK OUTLET	12,146.00
RICHARD'S SANITATION LLC	15,834.76
STONEBROOKE ENGINEERING INC	3,880.94
TOWMASTER LLC	3,072.42
VANGUARD APPRAISALS INC	14,175.00
VISA	7,002.73
WEX BANK	4,182.35
WINONA CONTROLS INC	5,330.50
WS TRUCKING & CONSTRUCTION LLC	3,382.50
	266,759.13
56 VENDORS PAID LESS THAN \$2000.00	25,640.49
	292,399.62
PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES	259,595.21
	<u>551,994.83</u>

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Coordinator Parker said the 2026 Legislative Session for the State of Minnesota started that day. He would follow what was happening. He said Engineer Pogodzinski, Environmental Services Director Meiners, Highway Maintenance Foreman Goeden, and staff had done a good job of getting ready for a MS4 audit. He said IT Director Milde did a fantastic job for the County especially when preparing for potential IT threats. Assessor Onstad had sent a letter on behalf of the County to representatives asking them to consider simplifying the property tax system.

The Commissioners discussed recent and upcoming meetings including an ECB, WinLac, Public Health, and School Mapping meeting.

Commissioner Johnson asked if the Commissioners wanted to consider passing other County resolutions for example a resolution suggesting the DNR bring back earn a buck, or a resolution encouraging the Sate to simplify the property tax system.

Closing Public Comment:

Steve Porter, Dairyland Power Cooperative, System Planning & Operations Director said he was there to speak to the board's resolution related to the Gopher to Badger Link transmission project. He said Dairyland was headquartered in La Crosse, WI and was an applicant to the State of Minnesota for the Gopher to Badger Link project with co-applicant, Xcel Energy. He said he had read the resolution and understood the questions and concerns from the County board. Porter said "Dairyland is a not-for-profit Generation and Transmission electric cooperative and through our 24 member electric distribution cooperatives, Dairyland serves many rural electric consumers in portions of four states, including southeast MN. Dairyland carefully considers cost impact and transmission needs for all proposed transmission projects. Dairyland's Vision is to provide safe, reliable and cost-effective energy to our member distribution cooperatives, which includes MiEnergy here in Houston County." He spoke about the process. He said "Throughout Minnesota's state permitting process, Dairyland's goal is to have an open dialogue with impacted landowners and communities. I want to assure the Houston County Board that many of the questions and concerns raised in the resolution will be addressed through the MN Public Utilities Commission's Certificate of Need and Route Permit process. Opportunities for public dialogue with the Dairyland and Xcel Energy have started with open houses in January and additional open houses planned for April. Additionally, with the Certificate of Need application being filed with MN Public Utilities Commission, comments will be able to be submitted to that docket as the PUC considers the application submitted by Dairyland Power and Xcel Energy."

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Zehnder, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, motion unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 a.m. The next meeting would be a regular meeting on February 24, 2026.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA

By: _____
Greg Myhre, Chairperson

Attest: _____
Brent Parker, Coordinator