

PSC DEPARTMENT DIGEST

Nebraska Public Service Commission
December 2023
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PSC Opens Second Round of CPF Grants

The Nebraska Public Service Commission has opened a second round of Capital Projects Fund (CPF) grants to bring broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the state. The new grant cycle will be used to award \$23.4 million in remaining CPF funds for projects falling within the 3rd Congressional District.

CPF grants are statutorily required to be awarded in Congressional Districts One and Three. At least \$40 million in grant funding was available in each congressional district for eligible broadband projects during the initial grant cycle in early 2023.

During the initial grant cycle, 130 applications for funding were received. Upon review of the application process and challenges the PSC determined 65 submissions would be funded. Projects eligible for funding in the 3rd district fell under the available amount leading to the second grant cycle.

“Eligible entities in the 3rd Congressional District are encouraged to submit an application for this second round of CPF grants,” said Cullen Robbins, Director PSC Telecommunications Department.



The application window for the second grant cycle opened on December 20, with applications due to the Commission by Friday, January 19, 2024.

Grant awards will be issued on Tuesday, June 4, 2024.

Application forms and detailed instructions are posted on the CPF-2 Capital Projects Fund page of the PSC website <

<https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/cpf-2-capital-projects-fund-grant-cycle> >.



PSC Prepares for 2024 Reverse Auction

The PSC has released a list of areas available for bid as well as starting prices for bidding units for its upcoming 2024 Reverse Auction ([NUSF-131/P.O. 2](#)).

Beginning in January, the 2024 NUSF Reverse Auction will seek to provide broadband capable voice service to rural areas where telecommunication carriers Frontier and Windstream have traditionally provided service. More than \$21 million in NUSF support that was either unused or withheld from the two companies will be available in the 2024 proceeding.

Pre-auction application forms were due on December 8. A list of qualified bidders will be released by the PSC on Tuesday, January 9, with bidding set to begin on Monday, January 22. The [procedural schedule](#) and more can be found on the [Reverse Auction NUSF-131](#) page of PSC website.

Hearing Held on Windstream 911 Outage Investigation

A hearing into the investigation of 911 service outages involving telecommunication carrier Windstream was held on December 28 at the Nebraska Public Service Commission.

During the hearing, a representative of Windstream provided information and took questions from the Commissioners and Commission attorneys on its network outages in September and November which affected 911 services in the southeastern part of the state.

The Commission's ongoing investigation into the events is seeking to determine the cause and scope of the outages, why required redundancy failed and a solution to prevent such outages from happening again. Testimony was also taken from invited witnesses.

The Commission will take information learned at the hearing into consideration as part of its investigative process before issuing an Order.

A second investigatory hearing into an August outage affecting 911 service involving telecommunications carrier Lumen will follow a similar format. That hearing will be held on January 4.

Effken, Casados Named PSC Excellence in Leadership Award Recipients



Matt Effken
Legal Counsel

Matt Effken, Agency Legal Counsel, and Laurie Casados, Budget and Finance Manager were honored as the PSC's 2023 State of Nebraska Excellence in Leadership Award recipients.

Effken, a member of the Commissions legal team since 2016 serves primarily as the attorney for the State 911 department. In his role he has been instrumental in helping the department and the 911 centers across the state transition from a Legacy 911 system to a Next Generation 911 system.



Laurie Casados
Budget & Finance Manager

In her role as Budget and Finance Manager, Casados has proven she can adapt and respond to extreme challenges. Her ability to research grant requirements and regulations along with her in-depth knowledge of broadband proved to be essential to the successful implementation of two large and complex federal grants.

Employee Appreciation Month Years of Service Awards

During October (Employee Appreciation month) 10 PSC employees were honored for a combined 185 years of service to the state.

Thank you to our years of service honorees for your professionalism and dedication to the citizens of Nebraska and the PSC.

- 5 years- Dohee Kim, Steve Kelso
- 10 years- Sallie Dietrich, John Monroe, Stasha Oborny
- 20 years- Deb Collins, Nichole Mulcahy
- 30 years- Greg Rocke
- 35 years- Cheryl Elton
- 40 years- Burdette Schoen



Walklin Named New General Counsel

Greg Walklin has joined the Nebraska Public Service Commission as its new General Counsel.

An attorney for 14 years, he is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska College of Law.

Walklin comes to the PSC after serving as the Director of Procurement and Grants for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). He also served as an Assistant Attorney General with the Nebraska Department of Justice, and as an attorney focusing on contracts and grants for DHHS.

"We're thrilled Greg has joined our team," said Thomas Golden, PSC Executive Director. "We have a very talented legal staff that will continue to thrive under his leadership."

Walklin lives in Lincoln with his wife Tiffany, their two daughters Evie and Nora, and their Yorkshire Terrier, Mocha.



Greg Walklin - General Counsel

New Inspector Joins Housing Department

The Housing/Recreational Vehicle Department has a new inspector.

Michael Plihal comes to the PSC with 35-years of experience in residential homebuilding and remodeling. He has spent the last five-years in the construction of modular housing.

Raised in Wymore, he, and his wife JeanE, have two daughters and four grandchildren.

Mike tells us he enjoys woodworking, fishing, and hunting and spending time outdoors.



Michael Plihal - Housing Inspector

Housing/RV Fees Remain the Same

The Nebraska Public Service Commission will keep fees for its Modular Housing, Manufactured Home, and Recreational Vehicle Programs the same.

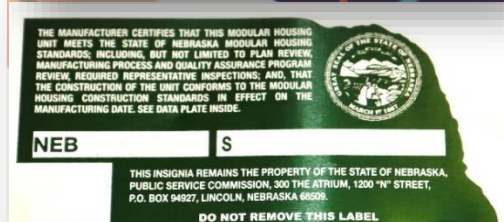
An annual hearing to determine the fee schedule for each program was held in October. Commissioners then approved Orders keeping the fee schedules the same beginning December 1.

The Modular Housing Program seal fee ([MODF-17](#)) will remain unchanged at nineteen cents (\$0.19) per square foot of gross space, and the new manufacturer plan review fee will remain at \$1,800.

Pursuant to the uniform standard code for Manufactured Homes, the Manufactured Home Program ([MANF-16](#)) seal fee will remain at \$400 per seal.

For Recreational Vehicles pursuant to the uniform standard code, the Recreational Vehicle Program ([RVF-17](#)) seal fee will remain at \$20 per seal, and the plan review fee will remain at \$20 per hour.

For more information visit the Housing/RV Department page of the PSC website @ <https://psc.nebraska.gov/housing>



Reported Scam Targets BHE Customers

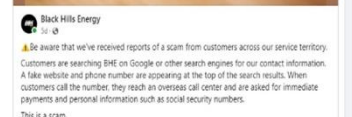
In mid-October, Black Hills Energy, a state jurisdictional natural gas utility took to social media to alert its customer to a potential scam affecting its service territory.

The social media post by BHE indicated the company was alerted by customers, that a fake website and phone number was appearing at the top of search results, when customers used Google or other search engines to get BHE contact information.

If customers called the number, they reached an overseas call center and were asked for immediate payment and personal information such as social security numbers.

The natural gas supplier assured customers that they had not reached Black Hills Energy and encouraged customers to go directly to blackhillsenergy.com, or to utilize social media to send them a Direct Message (DM). They also encouraged customers to contact BHE on the number found on their utility bill 888-890-5554.

The message was a good reminder to all consumers to use establish means when contacting services providers and to never provide sensitive information such as social security numbers.



Cold Weather Rule Reminder

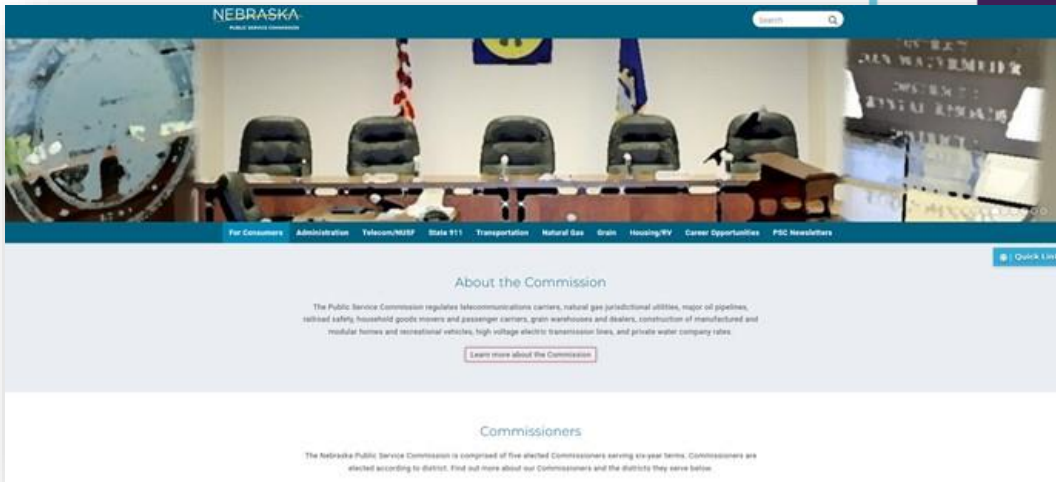
While we're on the subject of reminders, now is a good time to remember that the PSC's Cold Weather Rule is currently in effect.

From November 1-through-March 31, Nebraska's jurisdictional natural gas utilities, Black Hills Energy and NorthWestern Energy cannot shut off service to customers without allowing an additional 30 days to pay beyond the normal bill due date.

The PSC implemented the cold weather rule when it was given regulatory authority over the state's jurisdictional utilities in 2003. Nebraska Communities serviced by municipally owned natural gas utilities are not subject to regulation by the PSC and are not required to comply with the cold weather rule.

Customers finding it difficult to pay natural gas bills should contact the company to arrange payment. Local assistance agencies can also be contacted for help with natural gas bills including the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Salvation Army.





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The Nebraska Public Service Commission regulates telecommunications carriers, natural gas jurisdictional utilities, major oil pipelines, railroad safety, household goods movers and passenger carriers, grain warehouses and dealers, construction of manufactured and modular homes and recreation vehicles, high voltage electric transmission lines, and private water company rates.

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