



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

Ellen Nowak, Chairperson
Phil Montgomery, Commissioner
Mike Huebsch, Commissioner

610 North Whitney Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

For Immediate Release –October 20, 2016
Contact: Elise Nelson, (608)266-9600

PSC Authorizes Development of Rural Initiatives, Digester Programs

Expands funding for renewables, reaffirms Wisconsin's commitment to improving broadband access

(MADISON) - The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSCW) has voted to authorize up to \$47.5 million in unallocated dollars to develop new Focus on Energy rural programs incorporating anaerobic digesters and exploring the synergies to help expand broadband to underserved areas. Focus on Energy program administrator, CB&I, will now design programs consistent with today's Commission instruction and submit them for Commission approval. Final funding will be determined by cost-effectiveness of potential programs.

“It's important to recognize the role that broadband can play in meeting the goals of Focus on Energy efficiently and fairly across Wisconsin. By coordinating efforts, we can also help ensure internet services reach rural Wisconsin sooner,” said PSC Chair Ellen Nowak. “Ratepayers in rural areas have been receiving less than they pay in to the program and deserve a catch-up.”

Several challenges make it more difficult for Focus to deliver services in more rural areas of the state including low population density, fewer service contractors, increased travel requirements, and less effective and higher cost marketing and outreach. As a result, the benefit per capita in rural areas is disproportionately below that of customers in urban areas. These are the same areas that are typically unserved or underserved by internet service providers.

“Incorporating broadband tools into Focus delivery will make the program more efficient and allow more benefits to ratepayers,” said Commissioner Mike Huebsch. “Not only did this decision free-up an additional \$7.7 million in renewable incentives, Focus's annual operating budget is set to increase next year and beyond, up an additional \$3.2 million in 2018.”

CB&I is tasked with designing the following programs:

- Coordinating with other state agencies to design programs using \$10-20 million to expand biogas production and help keep surface water, ground water and drinking water safe.

- \$20-35 million for programs that will explore the synergies in using broadband expansion to underserved areas in order to improve Focus accessibility

Alongside the new rural proposals discussed in Thursday's Open Meeting, Commissioners also considered a review of other ideas to improve the cost-benefit ratio in rural areas.

“As an original co-author of the modern Focus on Energy program, I’m proud that this Commission recognizes the importance of requiring the program serve the entire state equally, promote rural economic development and provide additional benefits through cooperation between Focus and other state programs,” said Commissioner Phil Montgomery. “I see today’s decision as a step to improve and evolve an already very successful program.”

No new revenue is required for the expansion of the program. If approved, new programs will spend down otherwise unallocated reserves.

“Not only have we ensured an increase in the Focus on Energy budget for existing programs”, said Chair Nowak, “we have set in motion synergies that can leave our state with more competitive farms, cleaner surface water, cleaner groundwater and a faster, better, rollout of broadband to unserved communities.”

###