

INSIDE

Page 1 - Navigating the New Evening Demand Curve

Page 6 - Keeping Our Municipal Systems Secure: Cyber Resiliency

Page 8 - New Assistant GM at VPPSA - Grace Sawyer

Page 8 - New HCI Affiliate Relations Director - Robert Patrick

Page 9 - HCI Profile - Taylor Kilroy, TPPA

Page 10 - Winter Park Electric Utility - Strategic Roadmap for the Future

Page 11 - Upcoming Conferences

Page 13 - HCI Blog



Navigating the New Evening Demand Curve

Shifting Peaks and Tightening Budgets: Navigating the New Evening Demand Curve

For decades, small and medium-sized municipal utilities operated under a highly predictable daily rhythm. The traditional system peak arrived in the late afternoon as commercial activity maxed out and residents returned home. Grid assets were sized to handle that specific 5:00 PM spike, and capital planning followed a well-worn playbook. But the grid of 2026 is no longer the grid we planned for five years ago.

Across the country, public power utilities are experiencing a simultaneous pressure. Grid infrastructure is aging just as residential demand patterns are becoming more erratic and compressed. For a local municipal utility, the most vivid illustration of this change isn't happening at a massive industrial substation - it is happening at 9:00 PM on residential feeders.

The Anatomy of the 9:00 PM Squeeze

The widespread adoption of behind-the-meter solar installations and unmanaged Electric Vehicle (EV) charging has fundamentally restructured the daily demand curve.

- **The Solar Droop:** During daylight hours, residential solar panels feed power back into the system, masking true customer load and complicating traditional billing cycles.
- **The Evening Stacking Effect:** As the sun sets and solar generation drops to zero, a secondary - and often dominant - peak is emerging later in the evening.

When residents return home from work and plug in their EVs simultaneously, that unmanaged charging concentrates heavy electrical loads onto localized transformers right as household appliance usage peaks. The result is a steepening evening ramp that strains older distribution assets. Assets that were once expected to last another decade are experiencing accelerated thermal stress, compressing capital replacement cycles significantly.

Why Small Utilities Feel it Most

Larger investor-owned utilities often have dedicated departments to absorb these data-heavy integration challenges. For a municipal utility with a lean staff, the hurdles are unique:

- **Legacy Billing Inflexibility:** Managing net metering requires multiple data handoffs. Pulling generation data from customer inverters, applying proper credit rates, and reconciling it against standard billing cycles can overwhelm manual administrative processes.
- **Absorbing Peak Costs:** If a utility lacks a Time-of-Use (TOU) rate structure, it absorbs the high cost of this late-evening peak without a mechanism to recover those costs through rates.

Hardening the Grid: Federal Funding for Municipal Cybersecurity

As utilities connect more localized assets, smart meters, and EV chargers, the utility's digital attack expands alongside the physical one. For small and mid-sized municipal operations, safeguarding Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems and operational technology (OT) from sophisticated cyber threats is no longer optional - it is a critical component of grid resilience.

Fortunately, public power entities do not have to shoulder these security costs alone. The federal State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP), jointly administered by CISA and FEMA, is specifically structured to assist local government infrastructure.

The Rural Pass-Through Mandate: By federal law, states must pass down at least 80% of their total SLCGP funding allocations to local entities, with a strict requirement that at least 25% of the total federal award must be directed to rural areas. (www.homelandsecuritygrants.info)

For a municipal utility, these sub-awards can be used to fund critical baseline protections without draining local capital. This includes implementing hardware-based multi-factor authentication, performing vulnerability assessments, upgrading legacy SCADA network isolation, and providing cyber awareness training for lean field crews.

Three Practical Steps for Municipal Leadership

Navigating this shifting landscape does not require a multimillion-dollar local overhaul. Public power entities can take targeted, scalable actions to protect their distribution systems, secure their digital assets, and support their budgets.

The infographic is titled "NAVIGATING THE NEW ENERGY ERA" and is divided into two main sections: "BEFORE" and "NOW (2026)".

BEFORE: Shows "SOLAR GENERATION" with an illustration of houses with solar panels. A graph labeled "TRADITIONAL PEAK" shows a single, high peak during the day.

NOW (2026): Shows a "9:00 PM SQUEEZE" with a moon icon and an electric car being charged. A graph labeled "SHIFTING PEAKS & EV CHARGING" shows a lower, broader peak shifted towards the evening.

3 PRACTICAL STEPS FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP:

- 1 AUDIT ASSET DATA:** Includes an icon of a tablet showing "ASSET HEALTH". Description: "Consolidate maintenance and identify vulnerable feeders."
- 2 IMPLEMENT TOU RATES:** Includes an icon of a clock and an "EV" tag. Description: "Price-signal behavior to flatten evening peak."
- 3 EXPLORE COMMUNITY SOLAR:** Includes an icon of a diverse family. Description: "Retain control and improve energy equity."

Operational Strategies

- 1. Audit asset data over spreadsheets: Identify vulnerable feeders.**
Consolidate maintenance histories and transformer loading data into a structured system. Transitioning away from paperwork orders allows staff to identify which localized assets are experiencing the highest thermal stress from evening EV charging.
- 2. Implement simple Time-of-Use (TOU) rates: Price-signal behavior.**
Introduce basic, easily understood rate differentials. Giving customers a financial incentive to delay EV charging until after 11:00 PM naturally flattens the late-evening peak without requiring complex grid-automation hardware.
- 3. Explore equity-focused community solar: Retain local generation control.**
Instead of managing hundreds of individual rooftop net-metering connections, look into centralized community solar programs. A single, utility-controlled array allows multiple residents (including renters) to subscribe to clean energy while keeping the generation asset directly integrated into the utility's distribution planning.

Protecting Every Customer: Equity in Community Solar

While commercial and high-income residential customers are often the first to adopt EV and solar technologies, a core tenet of public power is ensuring that the transition to a modern grid does not disproportionately burden vulnerable populations.

Rooftop solar requires high, upfront capital investment and home ownership, automatically excluding renters and low-income families. A utility-led community solar program solves this equity gap. According to the Department of Energy's guide on community solar basics, structured programs can incorporate direct low-income customer protections by ensuring a dedicated percentage of the solar array's capacity is reserved for Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) households.

By offering fixed, discounted subscription rates to these households, the utility provides predictable bill savings to customers facing high energy burdens. At the same time, the utility retains complete control over where that solar generation hits the local grid, preventing localized voltage issues while supporting the entire community equitably.

The Way Forward

The defining characteristic of public power has always been community stewardship and local control. By modernizing operational workflows, taking advantage of federal cybersecurity pass-through grants, and designing equitable community solar programs, small and mid-sized municipal utilities can protect their local infrastructure, ensure long-term reliability, and keep public power affordable for every member of the community.

References

- Bynry. (2026, April 28). Electric utility industry trends in 2026. *Bynry Utility insights*. <https://www.bynry.com/blog/electric-utility-industry-trends-2026>
- Deloitte Insights. (2025, October 29). 2026 power and utilities industry outlook. *Deloitte Center for Energy, Resources & Industrials*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/power-and-utilities/power-and-utilities-industry-outlook.html>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2025, September 3). *State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program*. FEMA.gov. <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/state-local-cybersecurity-grant-program>
- Government Technology. (2026, May 21). *State cyber leaders ask Congress to support SLCGP, CISA*.
- GovTech Insights. <https://www.govtech.com/security/state-cyber-leaders-ask-congress-to-support-slcgp-cisa>
- www.govtech.com
- U.S. Department of Energy. (2026, May 14). *Grid modernization and the smart grid*. Office of Electricity. <https://www.energy.gov/oe/grid-modernization-and-smart-grid>
- U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). *Community solar basics*. Office of Energy Justice and Equity. <https://www.energy.gov/cmei/systems/community-solar-basics>.

The Hidden Cost of the “Payment Gap” in Public Power

When a utility’s payment system relies strictly on traditional banking or credit, a significant portion of the local community gets left behind. According to the FDIC, up to 12% of US households are unbanked or underbanked - meaning they rely on cash or non-traditional electronic payments to keep their lights on.

For a utility staff, managing cash collections manually can cause long lines, heavy administrative burdens, and reconciliation headaches. [That’s why Hometown Connections partners with DivDat.](#)



DivDat’s unique platform bridges this payment gap by offering a single, unified interface that handles cash kiosks, point-of-sale, mobile apps, text-to-pay, and online billing seamlessly. Your customers get the ultimate flexibility to pay their way, while your treasury team gets world-class, real-time reconciliation tools to make data-driven decisions. Let’s make utility payments accessible, secure, and effortless for everyone in your town.



Contact DivDat’s Mark Bierkle at mbierkle@divdat.com (248-727-7255) to explore upcoming payment processing options for your utility.

Keeping Our Municipal Systems Secure: Cyber Resiliency

As municipal utilities continue to integrate smart grid technologies and advanced operational controls, safeguarding our critical infrastructure from evolving digital threats remains a top priority. Securing our systems requires a proactive, multi-layered approach to protect both customer data and physical assets.



Prioritizing Operational Technology (OT) Security

While standard corporate IT security focuses on data privacy, utility cybersecurity must prioritize the continuous, safe operation of physical systems. Protecting Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) networks, water treatment controls, and electric distribution substations require specialized protections distinct from office network security.

- **Network Segmentation:** Visually and logically isolating operational networks from business networks to ensure a breach of an office computer cannot migrate to substation controls. This includes placing routers between networks to establish solid boundaries and filter out unauthorized broadcast traffic.
- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA):** Requiring rigorous authentications for all remote access points, particularly for engineers, technicians, and third-party vendors accessing control systems. This baseline relies on using entirely distinct and separate credentials across IT and OT systems to stop adversaries from guessing or repurposing passwords across networks.
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Utilizing specialized endpoint detection tools that monitor industrial control systems (ICS) for unusual anomalies or unauthorized command changes to identify threats before adversaries can actively exploit vulnerabilities.

Leveraging Local Collaboration and Resources

With the landscape of federal funding shifting toward local self-reliance, maximizing regional partnerships is more critical than ever. Public power utilities and municipal water systems can enhance their defenses by leveraging collaborative networks and community-vetted frameworks:

- **The CISA Cross-Sector Cybersecurity Performance Goals (CPGs):** A free, actionable spreadsheet and checklist designed specifically to help small-to-medium infrastructure providers implement baseline security practices without overwhelming staff. These goals provide straightforward, outcome-oriented practices aligned with real-world threats.
- **Mutual Aid and Peer Reviews:** Engaging with state utility associations and regional public power networks to conduct peer-to-peer security assessments and share threat intelligence. Because early-stage adopters use these models to benchmark their foundational hygiene, communal transparency actively lowers collective operational risk.
- **Staff Awareness Training:** Because human error remains a primary entry point for network intrusions, routine phishing simulations and cybersecurity hygiene training for all utility personnel provide a powerful, low-cost line of defense. Ensuring that access privileges are tightly managed and restricted to the minimum permissions necessary significantly protects systemic integrity.

The Bottom Line

By focusing on robust network architectures, strict access controls, and regional collaboration, our community systems can maintain the operational resilience required to keep the lights on and the water flowing safely.

Resources:

- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). *Cross-Sector Cybersecurity Performance Goals (CPGs), Version 2.0*. Maintained via the CISA Central Repository. Available online: <https://www.cisa.gov/cross-sector-cybersecurity-performance-goals>
- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). *Cybersecurity Performance Goals 2.0 (CPG 2.0) Technical Actions & Recommended Practices*. National Infrastructure Protection Master Files. <https://www.cisa.gov/cybersecurity-performance-goals-2-0-cpg-2-0>

GRACE SAWYER - New Assistant General Manager at VPPSA



HCI sends its warmest congratulations to **Grace Sawyer** on her promotion to Chief Financial Officer and Assistant General Manager at VPPSA! Hearing the news of her transition into this new role this past March was wonderful, though certainly no surprise given the incredible leadership and efficiency she has brought to the organization since 2022. Hometown Connections is always energized to see exceptional women rising into the joint action agency leadership ranks! Please know how proud we are of your success and how much we are cheering you on, Grace!

New HCI Affiliate Relations Manager – ROBERT PATRICK

Hometown Connections, Inc. (HCI) is proud to welcome public power veteran **Robert Patrick** to the leadership team as our Affiliate Relations Director, effective June 1, 2026. Robert is a deeply respected public sector and utility industry professional, bringing more than 20 years of leadership experience. For 10 years, Robert served as the Director of Public Service / City Manager for the City of Wadsworth, Ohio, overseeing 16 municipal departments. Robert served on the Board of Trustees for American Municipal Power, Inc. (AMP), holding multiple executive positions on the AMP Board, including Secretary, Vice Chairman, and Chairman. Prior to this, he honed his municipal expertise through various key leadership and operational positions with the City of Akron, Ohio.



Commenting on the new appointment, HCI Chief Executive Officer Marc Gerken shared, *"We are absolutely thrilled to welcome Robert Patrick to the Hometown Connections leadership team. Robert's extensive hands-on experience managing a municipal utility, combined with his strategic leadership on the AMP Board, gives him a profound understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities our partners face."*

In his new role, Robert will leverage his deep industry expertise to oversee HCI's collaborative network of joint action agencies, state associations, and technology partners. His proven commitment to utility operations and community service is perfectly illustrated by his leadership in vital industry resilience initiatives, including spearheading regional mutual-aid projects to restore power after severe weather and organizing volunteer efforts to bring essential electricity infrastructure to the Navajo Nation. We are excited to have Robert on board to help align HCI's specialized consulting and administrative solutions with the evolving operational and regulatory needs of community-owned utilities nationwide. Please join us in giving Robert a warm welcome to the HCI family!

The Hometown Connections family also wants to express our deepest love and support for **Mike Mozingo**, who will continue to be a vital part of the HCI family as he steps back to focus on his family and his health.



TAYLOR C. KILROY

HCI Affiliate Member



Taylor Kilroy has been the Executive Director of the Texas Public Power Association (TPPA) since 2023. When asked about his work, Kilroy said, “It is a true privilege to advocate for and serve the members of the Texas Public Power Association. Our member utilities are the backbone of their communities, and seeing their dedication to providing reliable, affordable power to Texans every single day makes this work incredibly rewarding. The collaborative spirit within our membership is what drives the success of public power across the state.”

Taylor Kilroy continues to build the staff at TPPA with experienced professionals that bring the same level of experience and commitment to Texas and the public power arena that he does. When asked what he enjoyed most about his job, Taylor said, “The shared commitment to public service. In this industry, we face complex challenges, but our members always step up to share ideas, support one another, and build a stronger grid. Serving an organization built on that level of cooperation and community dedication is an absolute honor.” Prior to joining TPAA he worked as an attorney in the Oversight and Enforcement Division of the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT). Taylor is a graduate of the University of Houston Law Center.

About Texas Public Power Association (TPPA)

The Texas Public Power Association (TPPA) was founded in 1978 to serve as the voice of the 72 municipally owned electric utilities (MOUs) in Texas. The Association’s membership also includes several of the state’s electric cooperatives and joint action agencies.

CEO of Hometown Connections, Marc Gerken, affirmed, “Our alignment with the Texas Public Power Association highlights exactly what makes the public power business model so successful: a shared dedication to service and collective strength. Working alongside TPPA allows us to deliver world-class Support - from strategic planning and board governance training to critical cybersecurity assessments - directly to Texas communities. Together, we are helping TPPA members navigate complex industry challenges and build a resilient workforce for the future.”

Contact Information for Texas Public Power Association

Address: 3410 Far West Blvd, Suite 280, Austin, TX 78731

Phone: 512-472-5965

Email: info@tppa.com

Website: www.tppa.com

Winter Park Electric Utility - Strategic Roadmap for the Future



Jamie England, Director,
Winter Park Electric Utility.

When Jamie England took the helm at Winter Park (FL) Electric Utility in mid-2024, establishing a clear organizational direction was an immediate priority. The utility engaged Hometown Connections to facilitate the strategic planning process, resulting in a shared roadmap designed to guide long-term priorities and decision-making.

The process was inclusive by design, engaging staff at all levels alongside the Electric Utility Advisory Board through a series of facilitated, collaborative workshops. The outcome was a strategic plan built around five Goals and 18 supporting Strategies, providing both structure and focus for the utility’s future direction.

“The planning process was thoughtfully structured. Their emphasis on inclusion fostered team engagement and ownership, helping to build consensus around strategies and priorities.” said England.

With the plan in place, Hometown Connections is now supporting implementation, helping the utility translate strategy into measurable action.

An advertisement for Hometown Connections. It features a photograph of Jamie England from the previous section, smiling and holding a tablet, standing at a trade show booth. The background is a blurred trade show floor with other people and booths. The text is overlaid on the image in white and blue. The Hometown Connections logo is in the bottom left corner. At the bottom, there is a dark blue bar with white text for the website and phone number.

**In a sea of identical vendors,
navigate with confidence
alongside Hometown
Connections.**

H Hometown
Connections

www.hometownconnections.com | (502) 395-0082

Upcoming 2026 Conferences

- June 1-3** **Energy Southeast (SEEA) Annual Member Meeting, Reston, VA**
<https://www.seealliance.org/event/2026-annual-member-meeting/>
- June 1-4** **CleanPower 2026 Conference, Houston, TX**
<https://cleanpower.org/expo/>
- June 2-4** **EEI Annual Meeting 2026, Las Vegas, NV**
<https://www.eei.org/Events/Local/eei-annual-meeting>
- June 7-9** **Palmetto Power Cities Annual Meeting, Hilton Head, SC**
<https://www.masc.sc/event/palmetto-power-cities-annual-meeting>
- June 16-17** **NPPA Accounting & Finance Conference, Missoula, MT**
<https://www.nwppa.org/conferences/accounting-finance-conference/>
- June 23-25** **Transmission & Interconnection Summit, Washington, DC**
<https://www.infocastinc.com/event/transmission-interconnection>
- Jun 26-Jul1** **American Public Power Association National Conference, Boston, MA**
<https://www.publicpower.org/national-conference>
- July 5-8** **ECA Annual Meeting and Governmental Affairs Conference, Gulf Shores, AL**
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/annual-meeting-and-governmental-affairs-conference/>
- July 14-16** **Florida Municipal Electric Association Annual Meeting, Palm Beach, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-annual-conference>
- July 14-17** **Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN**
TBD
- July 15-17** **TMEPA Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN**
<https://tmepa.org/event/annual-meeting/>
- July 20-22** **TPPA Annual Conference, Austin, TX**
<https://www.tppa.com/annual-conference.html>
- Aug 17-19** **Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association Annual Summer Conf, Saint Cloud, MN**
<https://www.mmua.org/summer-conference>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconections.com

Upcoming 2026 Conferences (continued)

- Sep 22-24** **Trees and Utilities National Conference, Portland, OR**
<https://www.treesandutilities.org/>
- Sep 22-24** **FMEA Power Line Design and Staking Certification Program Level 2, Kissimmee, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/2026-power-line-design-and-staking-certification-program-level-2>
- Sep 23** **FRI Annual Public Utility Symposium**
<https://www.naruc.org/events/all-events/fri-annual-public-utility-symposium/>
- Sep 23-25** **Northern California Power Agency Annual Conference, Olympic Valley, CA**
TBD
- Sept 29-30** **Michigan Municipal Electric Association Annual Conference, Battle Creek, MI**
Contact MMEA directly at (517) 323-8446.
- Oct 7-9** **Missouri Public Utility Alliance Annual Conference, Branson, MO**
<https://mpua.org/page/annualconference>
- Oct 12 -14** **AMP Annual Conference, Columbus, OH**
<https://www.amppartners.org/services/annual-conference/>
- Oct 19-21** **Electric Cities of Alabama Engineering & Operations Conference, Birmingham, AL**
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/engineering-and-operations-conference/>
- Oct 20-22** **TMEPA Fall Engineering & Operations Conference, Nashville, TN**
TBD
- Oct 20-23** **GridSecCon, Orlando, FL**
<https://www.nerc.com/programs/e-isac/gridseccon>
- Oct 25-28** **APPA Customer Connections Conference, Nashville, TN**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/customer-connections-conference>
- Nov 3-4** **FMEA Energy Connections Conference & Trade Show, Tampa, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-energy-connections-conference-and-trade-show>
- Nov 8-11** **NARUC Annual Meeting & Education Conference, Puerto Rico**
<https://www.naruc.org/events/all-events/2026-naruc-annual-meeting-and-education-conference/>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

HCI Blog

HCI Blog: A Platform for Collaboration and Innovation

<https://blog.hometownconnections.com/>

HCI warmly invites all its Partners and Affiliates to actively contribute to the blog. Whether it's sharing a recent project, providing commentary on industry trends, or offering advice based on your experiences, your input is highly valued. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the incredible work being accomplished across the network but also provide a valuable resource for continuous learning and development.

How to Contribute

Contributing to the HCI blog is straightforward. Interested Partners and Affiliates need to follow these simple steps:

- **Write your article:** Focus on topics that you are enthusiastic about and that would benefit the HCI community or public power in general.
- **Submit your article:** Send your completed article to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com.

Want to **STAND OUT**
in a Crowd?



**Advertise on the HCI Blog and/or
in the HCI Newsletter!**

Reach a targeted and engaged audience by advertising in our professionally rebranded newsletter, distributed by HCI Affiliate members (Joint Action Agencies) to their utility customers. This is a fantastic opportunity to promote your company and services directly to decision-makers and create business opportunities across multiple communities.

Space is limited, so reserve your spot today and get your business in front of the right audience.



Hometown Connections, Inc. is a national, non-profit utility services organization specializing in the unique challenges facing community-owned utilities. For more than 25 years, HCI has helped municipal systems transform their processes and systems by facilitating access to industry-leading technology, services, and consulting.

Owners

American Municipal Power, Inc.
Energy Southeast
Missouri Public Utility Alliance
Northern California Power Agency
Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

Marketing Affiliates

Energy Northwest
Florida Municipal Electric Association
Illinois Municipal Electric Agency
Indiana Municipal Utilities Agency
Michigan Municipal Electric Association
Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
Missouri River Energy Services
Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association
Texas Public Power Association

Sales Affiliates

American Municipal Power, Inc.
ElectriCities of North Carolina
Energy Southeast
Indiana Municipal Power Agency
Missouri Public Utility Alliance
Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority
Piedmont Municipal Power Agency

Partners

Acumen
DivDat
Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District
Exacter
Great Blue
Hometown Connections
Katama Technologies, Inc.
Leverage Leadership
Marsh USA
MFP Connect
PowerSecure
Quanam
Questline Digital
SpryPoint
Stem
The Energy Authority
Utility Financial Solutions

HCI Board of Directors:

Brannndon Kelley, Chair
Ken Nolan, Vice Chair
Jeff Haas, Treasurer
Jeff Haas, Secretary
Randy S. Howard, Board Member
Steve Stodden, Board Member

HCI Team

Marc Gerken, P.E., President and CEO
Nilaksh Kothari, P.E., Executive Consultant
Mark McCain, Exec. Consultant for Strategic Planning
Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing
Robert Patrick, Director of Affiliate Relations