

RESOLUTION NO. 26RS007

A Resolution Stating the Opposition of the City of Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin, to the Proposed MariBell 765-Kilovolt Electric Transmission Line Project

WHEREAS, Dairyland Power Cooperative and GridLiance Heartland, LLC, through the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), are proposing the construction of a 765-kilovolt electric transmission line extending approximately 139 miles from Marion, Minnesota to Bell Center, Wisconsin, commonly referred to as the MariBell Project and identified as part of MISO's Long-Range Transmission Plan, Tranche 2.1; and

WHEREAS, until September 2024, MISO Tranche 2.1 planning maps avoided the Driftless Area, favoring a more northerly route through Xcel Energy territory; in the three months between September and December 2024, a route through the central Driftless Area was adopted instead; and

WHEREAS, the proposed MariBell Project route would cross Vernon County, Wisconsin, traversing towns and rural lands throughout the county, as shown on the developers' own published route maps; and

WHEREAS, the City of Viroqua is the county seat of Vernon County and the county's center of commerce, health care, education, and government, so that the residents, farms, and businesses of the towns in the path of the proposed line are the City's customers, patients, students, employees, and neighbors, and lasting harm to the surrounding towns is lasting harm to the City itself; and

WHEREAS, the City of Viroqua sits on the ridge at the top of its watersheds, where waters rise and flow west through the Bad Axe River system to the Mississippi River and east into the Kickapoo River valley, so that the City shares responsibility for, and a direct interest in, the streams, springs, and valleys downstream that large-scale construction across this steep and fragile landscape would place at risk; and

WHEREAS, the City of Viroqua and Vernon County lie within the Driftless Area, a region characterized by steep and fragile topography, karst geology, cold-water trout streams, productive agricultural lands, extensive timber resources, and landscapes that are unusually sensitive to disturbance from large-scale linear infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, Vernon County is home to more certified organic farms than any other county in Wisconsin, with 230 farms reporting certified organic production under the USDA National Organic Program in the 2022 Census of Agriculture, more than twice the count of any other county in a state that ranks second in the nation for certified organic farms, and Viroqua's role as a regional local-food and farm-trade center depends on the working lands, pastures, and rural character of the surrounding towns (United States Department of Agriculture, National

Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022 Census of Agriculture, Wisconsin county-level data, Table 42); and

WHEREAS, transmission lines of the 765-kilovolt class require wide permanent easements, tall structures, and ongoing vegetation management that result in substantial ground disturbance and may adversely affect wildlife behavior, nesting success, migratory patterns, and the ecological integrity of protected and sensitive areas; and

WHEREAS, the construction and permanent presence of a 765-kilovolt transmission line may result in measurable reductions in property values for affected and adjacent landowners due to visual intrusion, limitations on land use within easements, loss of privacy and rural character, and perceived safety risks; and

WHEREAS, reductions in assessed property values or changes in land classification associated with the proposed transmission corridor may lead to long-term loss of property tax revenue across Vernon County, shifting the tax burden to other residents, including City of Viroqua taxpayers, and constraining local governments' ability to fund essential services and infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, the scenic blufflands, river corridors, forested landscapes, and undeveloped rural character of the Driftless Area are essential to the tourism, outdoor recreation, and visitor economy on which many City of Viroqua businesses depend, and the introduction of large-scale transmission infrastructure may substantially diminish that appeal and result in long-term economic losses to the City and the surrounding region; and

WHEREAS, the elected governments of Vernon County and its towns have already spoken: the Vernon County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution 2026-19 opposing the line on March 19, 2026, together with information-request resolutions 2026-17 and 2026-18; the Town of Wheatland (March 11, 2026), Town of Genoa (April 21, 2026), and Town of Sterling (June 18, 2026) adopted resolutions of opposition; the Town of Webster (October 21, 2025), Town of Harmony (April 25, 2026), and the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board (November 20, 2025) adopted information-request resolutions; and neighboring boards in Crawford and Richland Counties have taken similar formal actions; and

WHEREAS, residents, landowners, and businesses of the City of Viroqua and the surrounding towns have expressed significant concern regarding the cumulative environmental, agricultural, economic, scenic, and property-related impacts associated with the proposed MariBell Project; and

WHEREAS, the Common Council has a responsibility to represent the interests, welfare, and expressed concerns of the City's residents and to communicate those concerns to state regulatory authorities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin, on behalf of its residents, formally states its opposition to the proposed MariBell 765-kilovolt transmission project as currently proposed, due to the exceptional sensitivity of the Driftless Area and the unacceptable potential impacts on wildlife habitat, natural resources, agricultural and timber lands, property values, local tax bases, tourism revenues, and the character of the communities the City serves as county seat; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Common Council stands with the Vernon County Board of Supervisors and the town and village boards of the region that have formally registered their opposition to and concerns about the proposed project; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Common Council respectfully requests that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin give careful and deliberate consideration to the unique environmental, geologic, hydrologic, economic, and cultural characteristics of the Driftless Area and to the formal concerns of affected local governments and residents during its review of the MariBell Project; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution be entered into the official records of the City of Viroqua and transmitted to:

- The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
- Dairyland Power Cooperative and GridLiance Heartland, LLC
- The Vernon County Board of Supervisors and Vernon County Clerk
- The town and village clerks of Vernon County
- The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- State Senator Brad Pfaff (32nd Senate District) and State Representative Tara Johnson (96th Assembly District)
- Any other state or regional agencies involved in the review of the MariBell Project

BOARD ACTION: This resolution was adopted by a recorded vote of 9 to 0 at a duly noticed meeting of the Common Council of the City of Viroqua held on

August 25, 2026.

ADOPTED this 25th day of August, 2026.

CITY OF VIROQUA, VERNON COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Krista Browne Krista Browne, Mayor

ATTEST:

Lori Polhamus Lori Polhamus, City Clerk/Treasurer