

District 1

SAM D. VILLELLA

10534 Alamo Street NE, Blaine, MN 55449

Occupation

Optometrist/ Eye Doctor Allina Health

Board Experience

School Board Member ISD #16/ Spring Lake Park, currently Treasurer (2022-Present)

Optometrist - Minnesota Board of Optometry, currently Vice Chair (2019-Present)

Member of Blaine Planning Commission (2020-2021)

Metropolitan Council, Citizen Member of Transportation Advisory Board (2017-2019), Alternate (2019-2021)

Post-Secondary Education

Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry, Fort Lauderdale, FL - Doctorate of Optometry

University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences, Minneapolis, MN - Bachelor of Science



What do you believe is an important opportunity and the most important challenge facing Connexus Energy, and how would you address both if you were elected?

I'm honored to be nominated and placed on the ballot by the candidate nominating committee and I thank my fellow members for their consideration. Continuing to move away from GRE and the previous onerous demand charges is the key opportunity. It simply did not make sense for Connexus members to pay higher than fair market rates for electricity or to have rates tied to an inflexible power contract that stretched on for decades. This is also the biggest challenge as this needs to be done while ensuring access to adequate and affordable power supplies. Connexus has had great success with utility scale solar and battery storage projects. Many more will be necessary. The recently released 10 year resource plan is a thorough and thoughtful road map. This plan would need to be revisited regularly to ensure forecasts are realized in a satisfactory fashion.

What do you believe members want from their electric utility and what keeps them satisfied with Connexus Energy?

Serving the members is the first priority and job one. We rightly expect and benefit from safe, reliable and affordable electric power. Members have always appreciated the friendly, knowledgeable, and personalized service that Connexus employees deliver. Moving forward, members will increasingly expect to have more choices of service options to best-fit their individual needs and being in tune with their preferences should dominate service strategy. This will enable Connexus to continue to be a leader in member satisfaction.

What personally motivates you to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?

The energy transition is well on its way. Connexus is and must be at the nexus of this transition. As a budget conscience head of household, I have been diligently working to get the most out of our energy dollars for years. In our own home we have made many smart energy efficiency improvements including installation of a heat pump electric water heater, electric induction stove top, improved insulation and a transition to LED lighting. My family has been able to lower our annual heating and cooling costs significantly by taking advantage of the dual-fuel program in conjunction with our geothermal ground source heat pump. My wife and I have been driving electric vehicles (EV's) since 2012. In fact, our input was used to help develop the current EV time of use program that Connexus now offers. The program is a win for the members, a win for our cooperative and a win for the community. The members get a more efficient, cheaper way to fuel their vehicles. Connexus gets to grow load in a controllable manner while avoiding peak demand. Finally, the community gets an environment with cleaner air and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. One of the most important opportunities for growth would be to invest in the accelerating market shift to EV's. The manufacture and proliferation of EV's is growing fast and Connexus should be on the leading edge of this. Getting ahead of the curve for this opportunity will bolster long stagnant electric sales. Connexus can help demonstrate and educate members on the many attributes of owning and driving electric vehicles which include better performance, fewer emissions, cleaner air, greater efficiency, less maintenance and more affordable total cost of ownership. I would encourage an aggressive build out of charging infrastructure to make driving electric easier for all of our members. There are growing incentives to encourage the rapid adoption of EV's and I believe an early investment by Connexus would be returned many times over in increased electricity sales. EV's are definitely ready for primetime.

I believe in the electric cooperative business model, which puts member-owner interests ahead of profits and mandates that we deliver at-cost electricity to members. This is in stark contrast to investor owned utilities which put the interest of their shareholders ahead of their customers. Our cooperative is under pressure to adapt to a rapidly changing business environment. Accelerating technological innovation, changing member interests, and changing power sector economics are all driving this transformation. I am motivated to assist our cooperative in addressing these changes and to help implement the strategies needed to enable Connexus to adapt quickly to trends and shifting markets. I want to help assure our best possible future where Connexus will thrive. In service to my candidacy I bring a broad understanding of the utility sector and the electric cooperative business model - the underpinnings of what makes Connexus work for its members. I believe I have the background and skill set to fully contribute as a director and decision maker on the board.

What do you believe are the top three reasons you would be well-qualified to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?

Previous Board Experience - I have a solid foundation of extensive previous board experience which has included financial oversight, policy making and strategic planning. I am currently the Treasurer of the Spring Lake Park School Board as well as the Vice Chair of the Minnesota Board of Optometry. My board previous experience includes eight years on the Minnesota Optometric Association in all capacities including Trustee, Treasurer and President. I have also served for seven years on the Blaine Natural Resource and Conservation board as well as two years on the Blaine Planning Commission. I served for two years as a citizen representative on the Transportation Advisory Board of the Metropolitan Council where project attributes and regional priorities were weighed as difficult decisions involving allocation of scarce transportation funds were made. I have worked in my current occupation as an optometrist at the Cambridge Medical Center for nineteen years and previously served on the Medical Center Foundation Board. I previously served on the Highway 65 Public Advisory Committee as well as the Blaine 50th Anniversary Committee.

Passion and Interest in the Electric Industry - I understand that Connexus is challenged by rapidly changing technologies and market forces and I feel qualified to help guide Connexus to ensure continued success. I have a passion for this material and am drawn to it. I understand and enthusiastically support the cooperative model where member interests are the primary consideration.

Tell us what you believe are three of the most impactful member-owner benefits of the electric cooperative business structure?

Personalized Service - The first time I interacted with Connexus, an actual person answered the phone instead of an automated system. I was extremely pleased. The Connexus commitment to high quality personal service to its members is a major benefit.

Choice - Connexus should continue to put member-owners at the center of its business model and continue to learn and adapt to member preferences in service programs to best-fit member needs.

Community Support and Involvement - Finally, we benefit because Connexus is a cooperative that is a non-profit. The cooperative has a vested interest in the communities which it provides electric service and their success. As a member driven community-based institution Connexus is committed to educating its members and supporting a diverse robust economy.

Regarding your skills as a potential director, tell us one of your strengths and how it would contribute to the Connexus Board and list one weakness needing development and your plan to address it.

My biggest potential strength for Connexus is my knowledge and passion for the energy sector coupled with my previous board experience. I have a genuine interest in the energy sector and consume related information regularly. I want to help Connexus continue to thrive. While I have a solid understanding of the broad workings of the electric industry, I do not have extensive knowledge of the intricate details of the workings of the grid that the linemen deal with on a daily basis. I look forward to seizing an opportunity to familiarize myself with these details.