

With an emphasis on sustainability and reliability, the Town of Berlin, Maryland, makes an ideal AMP partner. With a population of about 4,500, Berlin became AMP's 131st member in February 2015 – the first in the state of Maryland.

Although Berlin once dealt with some of the highest electric rates in the country, dedication and thoughtful planning turned Berlin's rates around to one of the lowest in the area.

"AMP has helped us attain some of the lowest rates we've ever had in the community's history," said Berlin Town Administrator Laura Allen.

Located in Worcester County, Berlin is only a 14-minute drive from Ocean City.

In 2014, the town was voted America's Coolest Small Town in a nationwide contest sponsored by Budget Travel Magazine. Berlin boasts a vibrant town center full of small shops and restaurants; 47 structures in town are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Berlin's electric system has been in operation for over a century. Established in 1907, it now serves more than 2,450 total meters, with a 2014 system peak of 14,216 kilowatts (kW).

While Berlin's rates hit a peak high in 2007-2008, the town implemented a number of cost and energy-saving initiatives and went to work. Allen said one of the most significant initiatives involved working with the town's electric



Berlin's William "Jug" Savage Electric Substation

MEMBER PROFILE

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Berlin

utility consultants, Booth & Associates, to redesign the system to use peak shaving rather than generating power to support the town's electric load. Another key decision, she emphasized, was hiring electric utility director Tim Lawrence in 2010.

"Tim's experience and professional dedication took the electric utility to another level," stated Allen.

The adjustments worked well, and in 2012, Berlin was able to reduce residential and commercial rates by 11.5 percent. When presented to the Maryland Public Service Commission, which approves rates in the state, "Nobody at the commission could ever remember dealing with a rate decrease," said Berlin Mayor Gee Williams.

That same year, Berlin was the first-ever recipient of the Sustainable Maryland Certification, for which the town was also honored in 2015 by the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland. Allen explained some of those sustainability programs include an award-winning wastewater treatment facility, stormwater management, new sidewalks and other pedestrian friendly measures.

Mayor Williams noted, "The citizens of the town of Berlin recognize that in the 21st century, environmental stewardship and economic development are equally important sides of the same coin for any community that is going to develop a vibrant, diverse and sustainable quality of life for multiple generations."

Berlin's membership in AMP continues that positive direction, giving the community access to knowledgeable advice and better options for its energy purchases.

"We had spoken to city council about changing how we purchased energy, and part of why we joined AMP was to be able to purchase from a larger pool," said Allen. "AMP was essential to helping us reduce our power costs in a changing market."

With that support and access, Berlin's average residential bill dropped to the lowest rate the town had seen in over 10 years. Projections for 2019 are down even farther.



The Berlin Electric Utility Department was established in 1907. The utility is separated into two divisions: generation and distribution, and was lauded by the APPA in April 2016 with the RP3 Gold level designation for exceptional reliability, safety, workforce development and system improvement.



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Berlin Electric Department staff

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Along with that success, Berlin's electric utility was recognized for its reliability earlier this year with the Reliable Public Power Provider (RP3) designation by the American Public Power Association (APPA). RP3 recognizes public power utilities that demonstrate proficiency in four key disciplines – reliability, safety, workforce development and system improvement.

According to APPA, the designation recognizes utilities that are statistically thriving when it comes to reliability. The national average outage length for utilities in the top 25 percent is zero to 53 minutes, according to the announcement – Berlin's average outage length was just 17 minutes.

Allen said AMP's help was critical during the application process and that Berlin participated in AMP's pilot program dedicated to helping members obtain that designation.

"AMP has also been great as an overall resource, even with small things," she said. "For example, we were having trouble coming up with a good

term for a new demand side management (DSM) program we were putting in place. I asked AMP staff for some recommendations, and in less than a week I had 20-30 suggestions. It was extremely helpful."

Allen said that Berlin is excited to further its relationship with AMP, and will continue to explore ways to improve sustainability and reliability, such as the possibility of solar generation. And this summer, AMP's Board of Trustees paid America's Coolest Small Town a visit for the July Board meeting.

"To me, that's just another way that AMP helps us, in this instance with a group that stayed in our hotels and visited our restaurants – AMP is supporting our local economy," said Allen. 