

PUD proposes new substation for Leavenworth area

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To meet the expected growth in the Leavenworth area, the Chelan County PUD is proposing a new substation for Leavenworth. Currently, the Leavenworth area is served by one substation, behind the Chelan County Fire District 3 station off Chumstick Road.

PUD officials made a presentation before the Leavenworth City Council on Dec. 8. PUD Director of Customer Service, Andy Wendell, said the Leavenworth area has about a three-to-five year window before they reach full capacity for a Leavenworth substation, but that could change, depending how quickly growth happens.

"That could accelerate the need for that substation and bring it as soon as two or three years. The typical duration for planning a substation, all the phases, property acquisition, stakeholder engagement, ordering of the equipment, typically, it takes about a three year planning cycle to complete from beginning to end to incorporate a new substation into our system," Wendell said.

It is important they start now, Wendell said. Right now, they are in the beginning phases, and they need to keep the process moving along. He said they wanted to meet with the city council in a public setting to help them understand what the utility needs from an infrastructure standpoint.

The primary drivers are to meet growth and expansion as well meet the reliability expectations, particularly in the downtown area.

"Most importantly, we wanted to invite their participation in this process. We're looking for eight to 12 community members that represent the greater Leavenworth area, in the private and public sector," Wendell said. "Just to sit down and talk about the need for a substation, and in particular, look at site criteria."

Wendell said they want to evaluate which site criteria the customers feel are important, such as noise of the substation and aesthetics. He said they want to have a better understanding of customer expectations, so they can incorporate that into the property they select for a substation.

At this point, Wendell said they don't have any property in mind.

"We have some scientific analysis about where, from an electrical standpoint, an ideal location would be, but that is purely from an electrical standpoint, and has nothing to do with community interests," Wendell said. "What we want to do through this customer partnership group is reach agreement with the customers and stakeholders on the site criteria."

Once they've reached agreement on the site criteria, Wendell said they will look at a variety of properties that are available. Then, they will compare those properties against the agreed upon site criteria.

The goal is to narrow it down to two or three properties. Ultimately, it will be up to the PUD Board of Commissioners to select the best site.

"We recognize not everybody is not going to be completely happy with whatever site we choose, but we feel like if we've engaged our community and stakeholders, we think we can minimize the impact to any one customer, as best as possible," Wendell said.

In terms of electrical needs, Leavenworth is unique. One glance at the downtown area during Christmas Lighting will tell you that. Wendell said there's always been a unique and intense expectation among the commercial customers in the downtown corridor to maintain reliability.

"There's a lot of tourist traffic that goes through there. When the lights are out, they are not able to serve meals, or do the things they do. There is an expectation and it is a bit unique in our service territory that our service is very important," he said. "The one thing people don't have a good feel for is their expectations of capacity. They assume the utility has sufficient capacity to meet the growth and expansion needs."

The reality is, Wendell said, the PUD is starting to run out of capacity to meet growth and expansion. The two primary reasons for the new substation, he said, are to increase the capacity for energy, and secondly, the substation could help provide some redundancy and reliability to the downtown core.

The Leavenworth substation has been in place since the early 1960s. It is fairly unique in their service area, Wendell said, because it is really two substations. It has double the capacity of a typical substation.

The ideal area in Leavenworth to have a second substation would be somewhere in the west end of town.

"The reason being, that not only gets the substation a little bit closer to growth and expansion, but that side of town also give a chance to provide redundancy on both sides of the downtown," he said. "You would have a substation on the east and west side, which allows you to surround the load center, which significantly increases the reliability. If one station goes down, the other station can pick up the load."

Finding a spot for the substation in Leavenworth could be a challenge, because there is not much in the way of available land. Wendell said they encounter the same issue all throughout the county. The PUD can keep the cost of construction down, if the substation was closer to the load center, the new growth and expansion.

That is a challenge, Wendell said, because people value their property and there is not a lot available. It does not matter whether the substation is inside or outside the city limits.

"As you can imagine, we tend to lean toward what is best from an electrical standpoint. We recognize the customers that live in the same area as the substation, their concerns and interests are much broader than just the electrical system," he said. "They are concerned about the noise and aesthetics of the substation."

Some folks volunteered at the city council meeting to be part of a new committee, because there seems to be a high degree of interest, he said. The PUD will probably reach out to make sure they extend that information to people that weren't at the council meeting.

The next step would be pull the Leavenworth group together to start talking about site criteria. What type of site is desired? What criteria goes into that site?

"We want to listen to the customers, to find out their desired criteria. Then, try to blend those and reach agreement. Then, start looking a pieces of property. There's probably going to be three to five meetings with this partnership group to flesh that all out," Wendell said. "It may take a few more or take a few less. We are doing the same thing in Lake Chelan and it seems to be working well. Our customers like to be heard."

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