

North shore neighbors object to substation site

by Christine Pratt

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Photo provided/Chelan County PUD

The Chelan County PUD's Union Valley Substation, behind Lake Chelan Community Hospital, is one of two that have reached 80-percent capacity.



CHELAN — Where to locate an enclosure filled with giant, steel, humming, multi-legged “creatures” that are potentially dangerous, but essential to community demand and development?

That’s the dilemma the Chelan County PUD and the community of Lake Chelan face in siting a needed new electrical substation somewhere between Chelan and Manson on Lake Chelan’s rural but increasingly populated North Shore.

Many of the nearly 60 community members who packed Chelan City Hall Wednesday for a meeting on the substation didn’t approve of one of the PUD’s two potential sites, even though property co-owners there are willing to sell one of their 18 acres to the PUD.

"We don't want it in our neighborhood," said Boyd Road resident Michael Gibb, who lives near the proposed site off of Boyd Road and Henderson Terrace.

"We're not willing to sacrifice our property value," Robin Vogel, a Seattle-area resident with a vacation house in the area said. "Put it in a location where it can't be seen or heard from residential areas."

Opponents to site also objected respectfully but assertively to night lighting, commotion from maintenance, humming noise, and danger to area wildlife as threats to their neighborhood tranquility.

Willing land seller Scott Franzen co-owns 18 acres in the area with his mother. He lives in the Seattle area, but she lives on the property. He told the crowd that he doesn't want to "make enemies with anyone," but the PUD needs only one acre for the substation and it could be on his property surrounded by orchard, so no one would see it.

No one at Wednesday's meeting spoke out against another proposed site, about 1.5 miles to the northwest at the intersection of Boyd Loop Road and Winesap Avenue. The PUD has a willing land seller in that area, also.

The PUD's 115 kilovolt transmission line runs right between the road and terrace. The substations that it connects — one in Chelan and the other to the northwest in Manson — are at 80 percent capacity, PUD officials say.

The lake's North Shore hasn't had a new substation since 1980, but it'll need one soon to ensure a reliable power supply into the future, officials say.

The PUD has the authority to take the land it needs through eminent domain, but officials said they don't want to do it that way.

The utility will work to find a site acceptable to most customers, said Chad Rissman, the PUD's distribution engineering manager, and PUD Commissioner Carnan Bergren. But it will also have to be within cost parameters and meet legal requirements and PUD technical standards. A new substation costs about \$3 million.

"I really, truly believe the solution to the station — the siting of it — is in this room right now," Rissman told the crowd.

The farther the substation is from the existing transmission line, the more the line needs to be extended to reach the more remote site, Rissman said. That would increase costs and have the potential to negatively affect even more people.

Third-generation area resident Toni Berry urged opponents to have an open mind, saying none of the opponents would be living in their current homes if the generations who came before them also blocked construction of substations.

"I watch a lot of people move in, and as soon as they're here and have a little piece of this world, they don't want anything to change," she said after the meeting, paraphrasing a comment she'd made earlier to the audience. "My point is that my forefathers had an open mind, so you could be here."

The PUD is still accepting offers from property owners willing to sell for the substation. It is seeking public comment on the project through Sept. 9. Send comments or offers to teka.sellers@chelanpud.org.

The utility will hire a consultant next month to do a detailed cost analysis of each of the two preferred sites and their surrounding areas. Staffers will make a recommendation to commissioners in November and hope to buy the land in December.

Construction would happen in 2019 and 2020.

Learn more at chelanpud.org/newchelansubstation.

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