

PUD asks community for more Lake Chelan substation options

by Christine Pratt

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WENATCHEE — Calling all Lake Chelan North Shore residents: Have any suggestions for where the Chelan County PUD could build a new substation in your area?

If so, let them know. The PUD had identified two potential sites for a new substation, each with a willing property seller, officials have said. Now, they need more options.

One of the two property owners has withdrawn her offer to sell following the outcry of her neighbors, who fear a substation would reduce their property values, repel or endanger wildlife and disrupt the natural beauty and tranquility of their area.

The now-withdrawn site was near where Boyd Road takes an abrupt turn to the northwest. This was known as “Area 9-10” during the PUD’s community discussions.

The site is perfect from a PUD cost and logistics perspective because it’s very near the utility’s “service midline” — the point where electrical service originating from both Chelan’s Union Valley Substation and Manson’s Wapato Substation meet in the middle to power the North Shore, says Teka Sellers, the PUD’s spokeswoman for the substation project.

The PUD has the authority to condemn and take the land it needs to expand its electrical system, but PUD General Manager Steve Wright said they don’t want to do it that way.

“We want a solution that unites the community, not divides it,” he said Tuesday.

The North Shore hasn’t had a new substation since 1980. Both of the existing Wapato and Union Valley substations are approaching 80 percent of their capacity. A third is needed to handle future growth. It’s not possible to simply expand capacity in the existing substations, Sellers said.

Adding an additional North Shore substation will also free up capacity in the existing ones, preparing for the inevitable growth not only along the North Shore, but also in the population centers of Chelan and Manson, she said.

The remaining prospective North Shore site is about 1.5 miles northwest of the now-withdrawn 9-10 site, near the intersection of Boyd Loop Road and Winesap Avenue. No one has yet objected to that site, but PUD engineers estimate it would be a more expensive option.

PUD commissioners Tuesday told staff to look for more site options, and to move ahead with a cost analysis of the remaining site. PUD staffers met Wednesday to discuss their next steps, Sellers said.

PUD officials hope to have sites identified, so a consultant can do a cost analysis of each next month. They hope to bring the cost results to commissioners and community members in December, start the site acquisition process in January and start building in 2019.

Difficulty locating a site in Chelan and subsequent community outreach via focus groups has pushed the original site selection process back about a year, Sellers said. If delays continue, engineers will have to study contingency measures to ensure the North Shore power supply remains reliable, Sellers said.

The PUD touched off a bit of a firestorm in Chelan, when its engineers chose a site for the substation in March 2015 and entered into a sales agreement with the property owner before getting the community involved. They withdrew the site amid the ensuing outcry and launched a community outreach effort in 2015.

Tuesday's discussion drew many North Shore property owners who reinforced their objections to the now-withdrawn site.

Carl Glosenger, a 9-10-area resident, criticized the PUD for choosing sites based first on the willingness of the property owner to sell, rather than considering impact to nearby properties.

Kelly Daffe, another area property owner, said the process so far has been a waste of ratepayer money, because the PUD had proposed a site — 9-10 — that not only was objectionable to area residents but had an access road that traveled over properties owned by two different people, and one wasn't willing to sell.

Wright said he thought it was the correct process to get the community involved early.

"This was a sincere effort to get the attention of everyone who would pay attention," he told the audience. "Sometimes you discover things later in the process."

"It's hard to balance between when you come forward to the community," Sellers said Wednesday. "Are you going to reach out before you have the detail? Are you going to concern them (neighbors) before you need to concern them?"

She added, "We're looking for willing sellers who want to have a conversation with us. We're having a hard time finding those folks in Chelan."

Several Chelan residents who were part of a focus group to look for prospective sites, said they'd keep looking. Anyone who has other ideas should write to teka.sellers@chelanpud.org.

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SIDEBAR:

Meanwhile, in Leavenworth

The site selection process for an additional Chelan County PUD substation in Leavenworth has gone smoothly, a Leavenworth city official told commissioners Tuesday.

The Bavarian-themed city's substation is also approaching 80 percent capacity, officials say.

Here, instead of PUD engineers choosing a site and taking early steps to buy it with no community outreach, utility officials started the process by talking to city officials, project spokeswoman Teka Sellers said. That evolved into a community discussion that has produced three potential sites:

<> "Area 3" — At the west end of town, near the Heidleburger Drive In, on Highway 2. The property owner has not agreed to sell, but has said the PUD could conduct a cost analysis on the site.

<> "Area 9" — Expanding an existing substation already on PUD property near the junction of Highway 2 and Chumstick Highway. The PUD's Leavenworth office is nearby. The utility will analyze if such an expansion is feasible.

<> "Area 8A" — On city property near the intersection of North Road and Chumstick Highway.

Leavenworth community members involved in the site selection have asked the PUD for more detail to allow them to make an informed decision.

The utility will send letters to property owners in the vicinity of each of those prospective sites to get their feedback, Sellers said.

PUD officials hope to present the community and commissioners with the detailed analyses in December and begin site acquisition in January.

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