

PUD narrows potential sites for new Leavenworth transformer

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Last week, Chelan County PUD personnel informed PUD commissioners on the status of transformer projects in Leavenworth and Chelan. PUD Customer Relations Administrator, Teka Sellers, said there is a commitment, as they go through this process, to check in with commissioners periodically to let them know the status.

Sellers said they gave commissioners a summary of their engagements with the community, meetings, and other things they've done to keep the community informed and engaged. They also talked about upcoming meetings, including one Nov. 2 in Leavenworth.

"We also let them know we have three sites in Leavenworth that we plan to use for further analysis. We feel like we have support from the community as well as our community focus group to move forward with a high level cost analysis on those three sites," Sellers said. "The detail from that analysis is what we'll be bringing back to the community in November."

The PUD started engaging the community last December. In January, they started meeting with a focus group, which includes a balance of people around the community, residents, business owners, developers, city council, city administrator and planning staff.

A set of criteria was developed. That set of criteria was used to identify 16 sites, which were put through an evaluation matrix. The focus group came up with the scoring, based on PUD staff input. From there, they came up with three areas.

"We contacted people in those three areas to find out who would be interested in having a conversation so we could do a further analysis on particular properties. We went through the areas and identified parcels in each one of those areas," Sellers said. "Then, we have identified sites in each one of those parcels. We identified three sites."

One site is at the west end of town, on private property. Another site is on existing PUD property, about 500 yards from the existing substation, on the east end of town. The other site is owned by the city, on property near the intersection of North Road and Chumstick Highway.

One of the big issues for the public is minimal impact of overhead lines. Sellers said they hear this in Leavenworth a lot. This means minimizing overhead transmission and distribution lines.

"You'll notice when you drive through downtown Leavenworth all the distribution is underground. That is something very important to the community in Leavenworth. Aesthetics is a big piece for us. We need to balance aesthetics and what the neighborhood and community concerns are with our system requirements," Sellers said.

There are pluses and minuses for each site. Naturally, at the PUD owned site, there would be no need to acquire property. From an aesthetic and community value perspective, adding a third transformer to the existing substation would make a lot of sense, she said.

But, from a system standpoint, there are a lot of trade offs.

"We do have some issues with stranded capacity, meaning we can't get all of the distribution lines out of that location as it exists right now with the two transformers," Sellers said. "Adding an additional transformer would require us getting four more distribution lines out of there. Through the analysis, we'll see what that will look like, if it is even possible to get another four distribution circuits out of that particular location."

The high level analysis from the consultant is going to show feasibility, some rendering and also routes for transmission and distribution lines. The PUD will come back in November with that kind of detail for the public to consider, she said.

The site which would offer the greatest amount system redundancy is on the west end of town. Sellers said there are concerns about additional transmission lines, which run on the east end of town.

"We would need to get the transmission from the east end of town to the west end. One of the things the analysis will show is what that transmission will look like. Then, we can let the community know, if we put a substation here, this is what transmission might look like," Sellers said. "We know we'll hear some comments about that because that is a hot topic for folks in Leavenworth, overhead transmission."

From a systems standpoint, this site would provide redundancy, meaning if there were some type of emergency situation at the existing substation, the PUD could pick up load on the new substation in the west end of town.

The site would score highly from a system redundancy standpoint, she said. This is reflected in their site evaluation. As for the North Road/Chumstick site, the pros and cons are not as cut and dry.

"From a systems standpoint, it rated higher. From an aesthetics standpoint, it is on city owned property. We know there is some other development that will happen in that area at some point in time. The analysis would be about the benefits and trade offs on that site," Sellers said.

The PUD plans to meet with the focus group in October to review the high level analysis. Sellers said they will get their initial thoughts about it before formulating an agenda for the Nov. 2 community meeting.

There will be a public comment period. The hope is to have the consultant continue performing a detailed analysis on costs at each site. In December, Sellers said they will come back to the PUD commissioners with the final analysis.

It is hoped the commission would make a decision at that time, then they could begin site acquisition in January.

"If we are able to acquire the site in January, as our timeline is projecting, we would be planning, permitting and engineering in 2017, 2018. We would begin to order substation equipment in late 2018, early 2019. It takes about 18 months to build a transformer to our specifications," Sellers said.

"That would be delivered and we would start construction in 2019. We would hope to have the substation energized by 2020."

It is a long process. Sellers said the community involvement added a year to the timeline, but they feel like the engagement and community outreach has been a benefit to everyone, not just the PUD. The timeline was adjusted as they started the outreach process.

"We are very aware of the need for the substation given all the growth that is happening in Leavenworth. We would like to stay on this timeline," she said.

Sellers said the commissioners have asked them to come back very soon with more concrete deadlines on the timeline.

"For instance, if we aren't able to meet these deadlines and are forced to push the timeline out for some reason, whether for community concerns or we're not able to acquire the property we want or whatever issue, they would like to know what some of those concrete milestone dates would be, based on our growth projections," Sellers said.

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