

PUD to start over in search for Chelan substation site

by Christine Pratt

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PUD, Business

WENATCHEE — The Chelan County PUD is no closer today to finding an agreeable site for a needed new substation along Lake Chelan's scenic north shore than it was 18 months ago, when it launched a process to get area property owners involved in the search.

So, they're throwing out three site options that have stalemated community members and are starting their search from scratch.

The decision was a relief to the north shore residents who filled the PUD commission board room Monday. None want to live near a substation nor have transmission lines or the smaller distribution lines blocking their views of the lake.

Some say they'd agree to pay more for their power every month if the PUD would take on the extra cost of putting distribution lines underground, rather than on poles.

PUD officials were hoping to buy land for the substation from a willing seller and in a place that most area residents would agree with.

Early in the discussion, PUD engineers had advised residents that substations built farther away from their "load center" — the targeted growth area the new substation would serve — would require more overhead lines.

Some residents said they realized only when the PUD released new information over the past month that not only would there be more lines, but that poles would also be taller.

PUD General Manager Steve Wright agreed on a new land-search tactic.

"Not just limiting ourselves to willing sellers does make sense," Wright told commissioners and the gathered residents Monday "We'll look for options that create the most value."

That will mean a renewed focus on potential substation sites within the "load center" area, a broad expanse that runs roughly from the shoreline north to the PUD's northernmost of two transmission lines that parallel the lake, and from about 2.5 miles west of the western limit of Chelan to about Chelan Heights.

PUD officials will analyze new sites and present their selections to the public for review, officials say.

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, officials said.

PUD officials have said they can't wait indefinitely to build the new substation, because the area's power reliability would be jeopardized.

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