

Local law sidelines Athena charging station project

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

ATHENA — Grant Richie, of Minam, proposed building a high-speed electric vehicle charging station at his One Stop supermarket and gas station at Main and Fifth streets in Athena. But the project ran afoul of Athena's law banning new overhead power cables.

"There is only one universal fast-charging station in Pendleton," Richie said, "and one in Dayton. Walla Walla doesn't have one. Wildhorse Resort has Tesla chargers, but there is no universal high-speed charger between Pendleton and Dayton or the Tri-Cities."

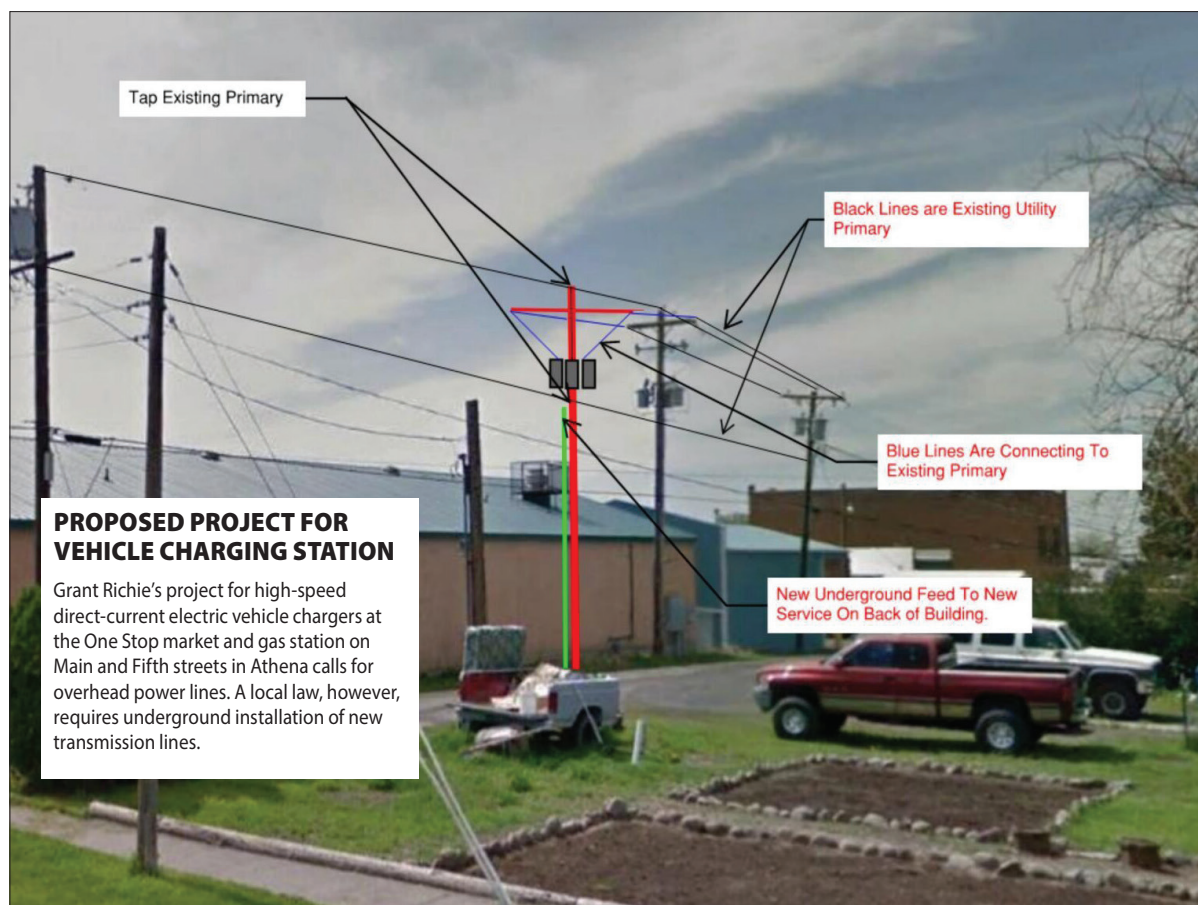
He also owns stores in Minam and Walla Walla, and Home Hardware Floors, while working as a river guide.

The Athena ordinance requires connections to existing overhead lines and any new local electricity or telephone lines to go underground, and lines to replace outdated existing overhead lines also have to go underground.

Project two years in process

Richie said he worked with Pacific Power to draw up a proposal based on the less expensive option of stringing power cables overhead. The power pole across the alley from the One Stop is maxed out with transformers. Pacific Power would have to put up a new pole and run two lines about 20 feet to bring 480 volts for the charger.

"I began planning and working on this project nearly two years ago to bring DC fast charging capabilities to Athena," Richie wrote the city. "This is not an easy feat, as DC fast chargers are around \$50,000 apiece, just for the charger before anything else. Our DC fast charging project is



Grant Richie/Contributed Graphic

projected to cost over \$100,000."

Richie said he researched grants, charging systems and associated infrastructure and spent several days writing a grant and hired an additional writer for help last year.

"Pacific Power flew a consultant from back East to Athena to go over our proposed project," Richie continued, "and see if it would fit the grant requirements. We finally received partial funding (two weeks ago), which is why I was meeting with Walla Walla Electric and Pacific Power to go over the final placement of the meter in the alleyway."

And that, he said, is when he learned from Pacific Power about Athena's ban on overhead

transmission lines. Richie then emailed city government about the project.

"It was not easy to get the grant for this project," he wrote, "and I will be footing the bill for a large portion of it. Athena will get valuable infrastructure at no cost to the city."

Richie also said he sought out the best charging system for Athena's and his needs.

"Community members need this infrastructure to have the choice to adopt (electric vehicles)," he wrote, "and I have put forth the time and money to get this project done. With current gas prices, (residents) need the option of an EV now more than ever."

After sending the email, Richie received a phone call from Athena Mayor Becky Schroeder. She told him the city would not give him a variance, because then it would have to give one to anyone else who asked for one.

"I explained the importance of this project to the people of Athena," Richie said, "but she was not moved to change her position."

City stands firm

Schroeder confirmed the gist of their conversation.

"We're not a stick in the mud," she said, "but anyone in Athena wanting an electric vehicle would probably charge it at home."

THREE EV CHARGING SPEED LEVELS

The U.S. Department of Transportation recognizes three electric vehicle charging speeds.

The slowest, Level 1 equipment, provides charging through a common residential 120-volt alternating current outlet. Level 1 chargers can take 40 to 50 hours to charge a battery electric vehicle from empty and five to six hours for a plug-in hybrid EV.

Level 2 equipment offers charging through 240-volt electrical service in residential applications or 208 volts in commercial. It is common for home, workplace and public charging. Level 2 chargers can charge a battery electric vehicle from empty in four to 10 hours and a plug-in hybrid in one to two hours.

The fastest speed, direct-current fast charging equipment, enables rapid charging along heavy-traffic corridors at installed stations. The equipment can charge a BEV to 80% in just 20 minutes to one hour. Most PHEVs on the market do not work with fast chargers.

Anyone from out of town coming off Highway 11 to charge a car at the One Stop might buy food or drink there, she added. A visitor would be less liable to walk another block to the Sugar Shack sandwich cafe or farther to the Doubletree restaurant and lounge. Thus Athena's economy would not greatly benefit from a fast charger, she said.

She said she blames the power company for not making optional plans for underground cables and a vault.

"I would urge Mr. Richie and Pacific Power to go back to the drawing board to see if the project might be feasible with buried cable," Schroeder said.

Richie said he is not sure if a vault for underground cables would even fit on his premises. He has not yet applied for a variance with the planning commission or city council.



Baker County Sheriff's Office/Contributed Photo

A single-engine air tanker drops fire retardant near Keating on Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2022.

Baker County firefighters quickly corral lightning-sparked blaze

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Jeff Phillips was surprised that only one fire started.

The thunderstorm that passed through the northern side of the Keating Valley Wednesday, Aug. 3, spawned far more than a single lightning bolt.

But only the one that struck just east of Gilkison Sawmill Road, less than a mile northeast of Phillips' home on a hill near the Keating School, ignited the grass that's turned to tinder during the record-breaking heat wave that started the last week of July.

"It immediately took off," Phillips said of the fire that ended up burning 197 acres. "There's a lot of fuel."

But there were also a lot of eyes on the smoke that rapidly rose as flames charred sagebrush and grass, including highly combustible cheatgrass.

Phillips, who is a cattle rancher, said ranchers were the first to respond, with two bulldozers digging control lines soon after the fire started. Phillips said there were control lines around about two-thirds of the fire before crews from multiple agencies arrived.

Chuck Lowry, a rancher who lives along Tucker Creek, a half a mile or so west of where the fire started, said he used a tractor with a disc harrow to cut a fire break.

Three bulldozers were at work almost immediately, he said, including one from the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District.

Buzz Harper, chief of the Keating Rural Fire Protection District, said he watched the storm cross the valley with trepidation.

He and Curt Jacobs, a local rancher, were on different hilltops with good views across the area during the storm and kept in contact by phone.

They both saw the lightning hit near Gilkison Sawmill Road, and within a minute or so, dark smoke was visible, Harper said.

He said he arrived within about five minutes, and the fire had already burned an acre or two. Within eight minutes he estimated the fire at 30 acres "and running."

The Baker County Sheriff's Office issued a Level 2 notice for several homes, asking residents to be ready to evacuate if needed.

There were no evacuations.

Lowry, Phillips and Harper all lauded the rapid response from firefighters from more than half a dozen agencies, including volunteer fire and rangeland protection districts, the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Forestry and U.S. Forest Service.

"I'm very thankful for all the resources that showed up," Lowry said. Phillips agreed.

"A lot of good people came to help," he said. "We're fortunate to have all these people and resources available to handle these fires."

BLM firefighters monitored the fire overnight and into Aug. 4 to make sure the blaze didn't flare up.

The fire started on public land managed by the BLM, and 194 of the 197 acres burned are public land, Harper said.

The 3 acres of private property are on Lowry's ranch.

Although the Keating Fire was corralled quickly, Phillips said he will continue to watch with concern if, as often happens during August and early September, thunderclouds once again billow against the blue sky.

"It's just the beginning of fire season," he said.

Notice

Recently, Avista requested a change in natural gas rates for our Oregon customers. We know you care about your energy costs, so we think it's important to share this news with you.

On July 29, 2022, Avista made four annual rate adjustment filings with the Public Utility Commission of Oregon (PUC) that if approved, are designed to increase overall natural gas revenue by approximately \$27.5 million or 21.9% effective Nov. 1, 2022. These filings have no impact on Avista's earnings.

The first rate adjustment is related to Avista's decoupling mechanism. Decoupling is designed to break the link between a utility's revenues and customers' energy usage. Generally, Avista's natural gas revenues are adjusted each month based on the number of customers rather than therms sales. The difference between revenues based on therm sales and revenues based on the number of customers is surcharged or rebated to customers beginning in the following year. If approved, Avista's request is designed to increase overall natural gas revenue by approximately \$3.5 million or 2.8%. This rate adjustment is driven primarily by a lower level of customer usage in 2021-22 due in part to a warmer than normal winter.

The second rate adjustment is the annual Purchased Gas Cost Adjustment (PGA) filing. PGAs are filed each year to balance the actual cost of wholesale natural gas purchased by Avista to serve customers with the amount included in rates. This includes the natural gas commodity cost as well as the cost to transport natural gas on interstate pipelines to Avista's local distribution system. If approved, Avista's natural gas revenues would increase by approximately \$23.9 million or 19.1%. This rate adjustment is driven primarily by wholesale natural gas prices, which are higher than the level presently included in rates. Avista does not profit on the actual natural gas commodity or the costs to transport natural gas to Avista's service territory.

The remaining two miscellaneous adjustments relate to intervenor funding and recovering costs associated with regulatory fees. The combination of those two miscellaneous filings is an increase in overall natural gas revenue of approximately \$73 thousand or 0.1% effective Nov. 1, 2022.

The bottom line

If all four requests are approved, and you are an Avista natural gas customer using an average of 48 therms per month, you could expect your bill to increase by \$13.10, or 19.2% for a revised monthly bill of \$81.27 beginning Nov. 1, 2022. All other customer groups receiving firm natural gas service from Avista would also see increases.

For more information

Copies of our filings are available at www.myavista.com/rates or you can call us at 1-800-227-9187.

This announcement is to provide you with general information about Avista's rate request and its effect on customers. The calculations and statements in this announcement are not binding on the PUC. For more information about the filing or for information about the time and place of any hearing, contact the PUC at: Public Utility Commission of Oregon, 201 High Street SE, Ste. 100, Salem, OR 97301, (800)522-2404, www.puc.state.or.us

This notice contains forward-looking statements regarding the Company's current expectations. Forward-looking statements are all statements other than historical facts. Such statements speak only as of the date of the notice and are subject to a variety of risks and uncertainties, many of which are beyond the Company's control, which could cause actual results to differ materially from the expectations. These risks and uncertainties include, in addition to those discussed herein, all the factors discussed in the Company's Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended Dec. 31, 2021 and the Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q for the quarter ended March 31, 2022.

