

County won't oppose new power line project

'Condemnation...should only occur as an absolute last resort'

By David Sykes

Morrow County owns property in the vicinity of a controversial new power line project near Boardman. And although commissioners have access concerns if the transmission line is built, they did not come out against the project, even though it will involve property condemnation which has been criticized by one of the commissioners in the past.

The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) will hold a public hearing June 4 to take public comment on the proposed Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC) plan to condemn private property for construction of the new 4.3-mile overhead power line. UEC

filed application with the utility commission to begin proceedings against several property owners along the route, who have not signed easement agreements with the co-op (see following letters from one of the property owners). The county submitted testimony as part of the PUC process.

"While none of the proposed routes include condemnation or use of county owned property, the transmission line would run along two sides of the county-owned property," the commissioner's letter to the PUC said. "The county has concerns regarding any negative effects on access to the county parcel (line goes over road,) and any insurance issues regarding

fall lines of the poles," it said.

The transmission line will run for about 4.3 miles from the Highway 730 switchyard and terminate at UEC's planned Olson Road substation. The substation is where a new Amazon data center is currently being built.

The electric co-op says it does not want to condemn property; however, the new line is needed to service a surge in customer growth in the area. Critics say the line is mainly to service one customer, Amazon, which is building the new data facility and reportedly needs additional power. One such critic of the condemnation is Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty, who

said the proposed power line route is the result of poor planning for the data facility. Doherty said, at an earlier county commission meeting, that another power line route north of the I-84 freeway would be better, and not require any property condemnation.

The June 4 PUC hearing will be held over the phone in the evening from 6 to 8 p.m. and the public can call in to give comment. The phone number is 866-390-1828 and the access code to join the hearing is 2252868.

The public comment hearing is an opportunity for customers and members of the public to offer unsworn testimony to the commissioners and Ad-

ministrative Law Judge. Because the purpose of this hearing is to take comments from the public, Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC) and the other parties to the proceeding will not make formal presentations and the commissioners will not take questions. Members of the UEC and the commission staff will be available to answer questions from the public during the public comment hearing.

Comments made during the public comment hearing will be recorded and transcribed. The transcript will become part of the public comment record in the proceeding. Interested persons not able to attend the public comment hearing may mail written comments to the

Commission at: Attn.: PCN 4, Administrative Hearings Division, Public Utility Commission of Oregon, PO Box 1088, Salem, OR 97308-1088; via e-mail to puc.publiccomments@state.or.us; or by telephone to: Consumer Services Division 503- 378-6600 or 1-800-522-2404. Customers may also contact the Administrative Hearings Division for more information at (503) 378-6678 or e-mail (puc.hearings@state.or.us).

Following are two letters written by a property owner J. Fletcher Hobbs, who would have his land condemned if the power line project moves forward as planned.

Oppose devaluing Boardman

Mr. Doherty, I am writing to appeal to you on behalf myself and the other residents and businesses along the proposed route for the Vadata power distribution line. Please help us oppose devaluing Boardman. The new Vadata buildings are going to have enough adverse effects without this line going through neighborhoods and businesses.

After initially rejecting the idea of the power distribution line over my property, I attempted to make a deal with UEC to allow a city street to share part of the proposed easement with the City of Boardman because the city is going to be required to install one to comply with DOT interstate regulations. I offered any proceeds from the easement to be given to the city to help complete the project. After several planning meetings; UEC agreed but returned agreements with ambiguous language regarding the street which would prevent the project from coming to fruition. I have offered to draft an agreement and looked at their revised agreements

but have met resistance.

There are routes available to get the power to the site through an industrial area north of 1-84. The cost is said to be greater, but in all the meetings I have attended relating to getting power to Vadata, I have not seen evaluation of that route. Even if the cost truly is greater; the burden should be placed on the customer needing the distribution line, not the surrounding community which already afforded Vadata hundreds of millions of dollars in tax deferrals.

I have struggled to come to terms with this project. I understand that growth is part of human existence, and that things don't always end up the way I want them to. The reality for me is that if I allow UEC to take 1.5 acres for a distribution line to Vadata, and the City of Boardman to take 1.5 acres for their street; I will no longer be able to operate at the facility I spent my life's wealth on. I am one of the largest employers in this area. I pay my employees well, and I ensure my customer's profits. Custom Feed Services is

now a keystone company in this community. I did all due diligence before even buying this property to ensure it would work for my company and the community we chose for our home.

When I speak with the Tallmans and hear that UEC's offer would have Terry leave his garden; I am angered about the things they say regarding him being unreasonable. When I look at the map of the proposed route with the Fredericksons; my heart breaks thinking about each of their homes being affected by this project.

I think there are good people leading our community, but there is a misguided group mentality that this Vadata project needs to be pushed through. There are rules, laws and guidelines that are being bent to the will of Vadata. Those rules, laws and guidelines were put there to help leaders make the right decisions when dealing with people or entities that we need, but don't necessarily carry the same values that make a successful community.

Let's be good leaders, J. Fletcher Hobbs

Reaching point of no return on PUC hearing

To the editor

Since my last letter to anyone who will listen, I talked with several more folks and revisited a few. I have had an interview with a newspaper writing a feature and set up interviews for others. I have crafted a strategy with my attorneys to lay out the position we hold for the PUC and hired experts in the field of power distribution and engineering to drive the point home.

I have appointments to visit with some of you in the near future, but I feel we are approaching a point of no return on the PUC hearing. I desperately want to stop the things that I am doing to fight this extreme action made by UEC. Extreme actions cause extreme reactions and I think I can speak for all of us when I say that we do not want any of the adverse consequences of extreme actions.

I am appealing to all of you because I am confident that I will succeed in having the Public Utility Commission deny UEC's application for convenience and necessity. The actions I must take to do so will most certainly cause irreparable damage to future commerce in our community. That is as clear to me as these actions are of being the only ones I can take.

The folks at UEC need to get power to the middle of Boardman on the south side of the freeway. They are feeling pressure and want to rush forward to complete this project. It is a complicated task because of many obstacles, but that is why they are a publicly owned entity; sometimes they have to do complicated/expensive things in order to power the community they work for. Some representatives at UEC are treating this application to the PUC as no big deal but evoking the 5th amendment in order to seize someone's property is extreme, and a very big deal. It is sometimes a necessity but should not be weaponized in the name of expediency.

All of us interested in continuing to see this area prosper have an obligation to say "not yet" to UEC. The leaders of UEC claim they don't see a path to powering that neighborhood without the hammer of condemnation, but I don't believe that, because I see a path. I am not suggesting that UEC and its leaders are bad guys, but they are running fast and loose, and it is our community and guaranteed basic rights which are suffering.

I have crafted a sword which I can only use to de-

fend myself in an effective, but destructive manner. You, as leaders though, have the ability to take this sword from me and use it to cut the ribbon on a new era in the Boardman area. After which; you can hang it on the wall for decoration and we'll have a feast after UEC does their homework.

Please join me in opposing the application for convenience and necessity at the PUC hearing. Better yet; ask the leaders at UEC to withdraw their application now. Withdrawing the application will allow UEC to save face as well as restore faith within the community that they have not become pirates plundering for large corporations. If UEC applies themselves to finding the path that preserves our community and adheres to our rules and codes; I am confident they will find that path. If all avenues have been pursued and weighed, and it is impossible to run the line without spoilage; it will be evident and we will have to accept it. The act of opposing the application does not prevent our community from growing and moving forward; it will just be a firm reminder to UEC that the best way to finish a job is to do it right.

I would love for the article being printed Wednesday to be a coming of age story. One where an adolescent community tries some new things, makes some mistakes, has crisis, makes some friends, and perseveres. The citizens who gathered with pitchforks will cheer and hug knowing their leaders figured it out and companies looking to site will be confident in the stability of the area. There is no reason I can think of for us to choose another ending. We can get it right.

Thank you for participating, J. Fletcher Hobbs, Boardman

Bank of Eastern Oregon among 200 top performing banks in nation

American Banker magazine has ranked five Oregon and eleven Washington banks among the top 200 community banks in the country.

The magazine, a trade publication based in New York City, named Oregon Bancorp of Salem, OR; FS Bancorp of Mountlake Terrace, WA; Timberland Bancorp of Hoquiam, WA; Summit Bank of Eugene, OR; Baker Boyer Bancorp of Walla Walla, WA; Community Financial Group of Spokane, WA; Pacific Fi-

nanacial Corp. of Aberdeen, WA; Cashmere Valley Bank of Cashmere, WA; BEO Bancorp of Heppner, OR; Riverview Bancorp of Vancouver, WA; Peoples Bancorp of Bellingham, WA; Citizens Bancorp of Corvallis, OR; U&I Financial Corp of Lynnwood, WA; Coastal Financial Corp. of Everett, WA; Commencement Bank of Tacoma, WA; and People's Bank of Commerce in Medford, OR to the list based on average return of shareholder equity between 2017 and 2019.

Banks with less than \$2 billion in assets were eligible.

The above referenced banks rank, and average return are as follows: #1 Oregon Bancorp 29.4 percent; #14 FS Bancorp 14.96 percent; #20 Timberland Bancorp 14.47 percent; #36 Summit Bank 12.9 percent; #53 Baker Boyer Bancorp 12.18 percent; #57 Community Financial Group 12.08 percent; #71 Pacific Financial Corp 11.51 percent; #74 Cashmere Valley Bank 11.49 percent; #84 BEO Bancorp 11.27 percent;

#89 Riverview Bancorp 11.2 percent; #95 Peoples Bancorp 11.0 percent; #103 Citizens Bancorp 10.65 percent; #116 U&I Financial Corp 10.44 percent; #124 Coastal Financial Corp. 10.32 percent; #170 Commencement Bank 9.69 percent; #192 People's Bank of Commerce 9.43 percent

"It is exciting to be recognized in American Banker magazine among some of the most admired and well ran banks in the country," said Jeff Bailey

President and CEO of Bank of Eastern Oregon. "We have an extremely dedicated team of bankers that embody the core values that have guided our bank for over 75 years. We are proud to serve eastern Oregon and southeastern Washington communities and are delighted to be the one of only 16 banks located in Oregon and Washington that can make the claim of being one of the top 200 community banks in the country," concluded Bailey.

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