

Public Comment for Mt. Shasta City Council meeting December 14, 2020
From Geneva Omann, 2536 Muledeer Drive, Hammond Ranch.

I am here to speak about the need to underground the power lines associated with the Lassen Substation Project for the purpose of public safety and how to pay for it. Putting the power lines underground will significantly reduce the wildfire risk to our communities.

According the Pacific Power's Todd Andrus, who spoke at the City Council meeting in October, the Lassen substation project is still "under development". So there is still an opportunity for the City to work with Pacific Power in developing a plan that includes undergrounding those power lines. Also let me note that Siskiyou County is currently renegotiating Pacific Power's franchise related to easements for transmission and distribution lines in this County. Now is the time to work with the County to have them leverage their position in these negotiations with Pacific Power to ensure that the power lines associated with the Lassen Substation project are put underground.

Undergrounding is more expensive, although not nearly as expensive as burning down a whole town and its beautiful surroundings. Nonetheless, how could the cost for undergrounding the 1.5 miles of transmission lines be covered?

1. The CPUC requires the utility companies to maintain a pot of money to support undergrounding of powerlines (Rule 20). Todd Andrus said at the October City Council meeting there is enough money in Mt. Shasta's allocation to underground one mile of lines—enough to cover 2/3 of the cost. In addition, communities can borrow forward up to five years of additional allocations. Let me note that the CPUC can reallocate work credits from communities that have been inactive in the Rule 20 program—in other words, “use it or lose it”.
2. PP's budget for replacing the existing lines with new, higher towers and new cables would likely cover the cost of an additional quarter of a mile of underground line.
3. If that isn't enough, the primary corporate beneficiaries of this project, Pacific Power/Berkshire Hathaway and Crystal Geyser/Otsuka could provide the remaining costs as an investment in the safety of our region.

According to CPUC rules, communities are to work with the utility company to identify projects for Rule 20 funding. Please contact the decision makers at Pacific Power and work with the county to use your collective influence to get PP to put those lines underground.

For the safety of citizens within the City and in Siskiyou County, please take assertive action in this matter.

I would like to extend greetings to the new City Council members and gratitude to the outgoing and remaining Councilors. Best wishes to all for a Happy Holiday Season.