

OPEN HOUSE Events – Member Comments

October 6-11, 2016

More than 100 Co-op members attended a series of open house events on Lopez, San Juan, Shaw and Orcas islands to, primarily, review and discuss the recommendations for changes to the election process proposed by a member review committee in September. In general and across all of the islands, members who attended the events stated their preference for:

1. Voting by full membership was endorsed and the idea of voting by district was rejected.
2. The overwhelming majority on Lopez and Shaw attendees thought the redistricting discussion was put to rest at the last annual meeting and questioned why the topic is being raised again. On Orcas and San Juan, there was less interest and more support for redistricting, however members felt the issue should be put to a vote of the whole membership.
3. The proposed shift in balloting, moving to an all-absentee (by mail and online) so that the annual meeting would become more substantive and participatory.
4. A standing nominating committee made up of rotating members from each district who are appointed by the Board. Members stated a strong desire for the Nominating Committee to be representative of the diversity of each district.
5. Members were confused and concerned about the proposal to add two additional directors to the Board; unless the full membership voted in favor of the change and most preferred that all Board positions being filled from the pool of OPALCO members.
6. Stagger board positions on the ballot for elections (in the existing configuration of 7 directors) so that at there are representatives from more than one district on the ballot in each membership-wide vote.

The majority of the Committee's recommendations were uncontroversial and applauded for their intent to bring greater fairness, transparency and member involvement to the election process.

The Open House Events were primarily designed to capture individual member feedback at three distinct content stations (election changes, Rock Island and OPALCO) where staff would speak with members directly and members could record their comments and questions. Members demanded a group Q&A session instead, which minimized the opportunities for capturing verbatim member feedback – and also minimized opportunities to discuss Rock Island or OPALCO topics.

What follows are the comments that could be captured from the group discussions and evaluation forms that a minority of members (32/107) filled out following the meetings.

Lopez Comments:

- Teleconference capacity for meetings
- OPALCO used to be a trusted part of our County. Now with the purchase of RIC (after a NO vote) and then redistricting (with a NO vote) – and then here it is again. I wish OPALCO was focusing on energy – solar/wind/other alternatives that move us toward a lower carbon footprint. I value Internet, but still have to be convinced that OPALCO can dilute its efforts and finances to pull it off. I appreciate the listening that happened tonight. Thank you.
- We need to listen and hear each other. The planned format would have created a lot of frustration and resentment. Thank you for being willing to change the format so that our needs are met. We hope for more dialogue like this.

- More transparency – gain trust of members
- Conflict of interest in purchase of RIC and financial impact to cooperative
- The moderators and board members did a great job. Information was shared. There was not enough time to discuss all the important topics. For example, Rock Island was not discussed at all.
- A co-op in name only. “Members” have no influence much less control. Board members are prohibited from acting as representatives. See Policy 1.
- Non-member should not be on board.
- Lose the nominating committee. OPALCO uses this to discriminate against candidates nominated by the members. At OPALCO Unfairness is bread (sic) in the bone.
- Please do not do recommendation #2. County tried district only voting then rejected it. Too many things pull us apart as a county – we need OPALCO as one of our unifying elements.
- Thank you for copy of complete elections report
- Praise God for people on Lopez who can speak well. I agree with Sandy Bishop, Liz Scanton and Dwight who focused on good points.
- Thank you for taking serious good criticisms well.
- It was good to see how our island likes to dig and share info to make fair suggestions.
- I am not at all interested in Rock Island.
- There was really no time to talk with employees. Your agenda was too big for one evening.
- It was a poor way to recruit for the committee volunteers and not toward such a vague mission statement with no guidelines – too wide a focus.
- Director compensation was a waste of their time. Don’t bother with this. Please stick to getting pleasant, intelligent, wise, strong directors who relate with the rest of the membership and are not on the board to get an extra paycheck.
- #7 – I agree – excellent section.
- No non-members board members. Should not have even been researched. Okay to get info from them but not to elect them and not appoint them to board.
- I agree with local directors chairing district meetings.
- Do not like power point presentations. Thanks for not doing one.
- Foster did much better this last meeting.
- When resolutions on the ballot present a pro and con for public reading – both on the same side of the page.
- I do not agree with having a nominating committee. Best is by petition..
- It is a good idea to adjust the election timeline – I agree with recommendation #4.
- Interesting hand-out chart on “an electric co-op” I still question principle #2 – democratic control.
- Thanks for all your hard work.
- I agree with the concept of a nominating committee that is inclusive, diverse, timely . . . however you find a way to do that.
- I do not think a non-member should be on the Board. If you need an expert, bring that expert in as a consultant, or create a committee to advise. ALL board members should be members and elected.
- I think it’s reasonable to consider a higher stipend for Board members.
- I agree with Randy Cornelius that the following recommendations are inappropriate for OPALCO: #2, #5. Neither of these serve the membership and both undermine the principle of one member: one vote.

San Juan Comments:

- Hard to get enough “bandwidth” when a few loud individuals dominate the meeting – but thank you for trying.
- Foster interrupted everyone.
- Hearing from staff was valuable – but putting up with a few participants with axes to grind was not work my time.

Shaw Comments:

- The issue of districting should be dropped this issue was voted and defeated by the membership.
- Keep the current 4 districts.
- Not enough handouts.

Orcas Comments:

- Thanks for phenomenal Internet service on Obstruction Island
- Comfortable forum for feedback
- Great snacks
- I admit to being ignorant about the computer and related issues – need education; low-income and older people need education about this.