

Eric Beckman | Candidate Questions

OPALCO

1. **What is your vision for the future of energy for San Juan County as a whole?**

My vision is that we take advantage of the nimble nature inherent in a small county to emerge from a fast-changing energy landscape as a good national example of what the future of energy can look like.

That our county culture becomes when you turn on your light switch, you consider where/how that electricity was generated, and how you fit in the bigger picture of continuing to enjoy reliable, affordable energy in our rural county.

Pressing forward with that vision begins with OPALCO leveraging the successful launch of the Decatur microgrid to aggressively pursue and win necessary grant funding to integrate a network of such microgrids to steadily reduce reliance on mainland energy.

2. **What is your understanding of OPALCO's plan for its future of energy supply?**

Pillars of the supply side strategy over the coming decades focus on evolving OPALCO's energy sources to be more local and more diversified by:

- Expanding year-round local power generation through investment in solar/tidal/wind.
- Gaining distribution efficiency by expanding storage capacity throughout grid.
- Building resiliency into the grid to mitigate disruption should the mainland power grid go dark for any reason as befell over 10 million people in Texas this past February, 2021.

3. **Given the intermittency of renewable resources, how important is hydropower in your vision for a future energy supply in the islands?**

Today, over 80% of the electricity OPALCO delivers is generated from hydropower. Further, OPALCO members use 2X as much energy during the winter when options like solar production offer limited value as during the summer.

Given the foregoing, preserving our connection to mainland hydropower, and investing to maintain the submarine cables that deliver it, will remain essential in the near-term to meet peak loads and forecasted demand growth.

4. **What role should OPALCO play in the regional power community?**

OPALCO should lead the way in co-developing energy solutions with the members it serves. This begins with educational campaigns to heighten awareness of the major changes looming on the energy landscape and to equip members to make informed decisions.

Through community dialog and proactively involving partners like county government, the San Juan Preservation Trust, and the Land Bank, OPALCO has responsibility to:

- Influence demand by exploring new energy conservation methods.
- Optimize the evolving BPA relationship.
- Minimize adverse impacts of infrastructure expansion.
- Balance utility rates with reliability.

5. **Where will you draw the line between local energy resilience and island aesthetics?**

If we were to achieve the best possible energy outcomes, but at the cost of sacrificing island aesthetics, we would have followed a failed strategy. THE TAIL CANNOT WAG THE DOG. Protecting and preserving the archipelago's natural beauty and ecosystems must remain a core requirement for any solution under consideration.

To be sure, finding suitable sites for new infrastructure will remain a challenging and potentially contentious issue, however with sound planning and community involvement a harmonious energy/aesthetics balance can be achieved.

6. **The County Comprehensive Plan cites "energy independence" as a goal. What is your understanding of this goal?**

'Energy independence' serves as an aspirational goal designed to unify the community around the county's response to the fast-changing energy landscape. Near-term, it can be measured through incremental improvement in the fuel mix between locally generated/mainland generated energy.

Longer term, this goal will also impact land use policies and regulations. For example, working with OPALCO to site new facilities, align county plans with utility service plans, and evaluate growth patterns to forecast demand.

7. **How would you propose to keep member's power bills affordable?**

The State of Washington enjoys the lowest average residential electricity rates in the country. However, clear macroeconomic trends most certainly will apply upward pricing pressure on the Northwest's hydroelectric power.

In addition to generating more power locally, one option to mitigate this trend is to reimagine electricity rate design. Specifically, to align rates with differing customer needs. For example, even though the cost to generate and distribute electricity varies hour to hour, the current structure bundles all service into one volumetric rate. By load shaping through rates, perhaps experimenting with a time-of-use pricing component to discourage inefficient use of electricity at peak periods, members could be better empowered to manage their costs.

Incorporating bi-directional energy flow between the grid and member owned solar, battery and home-automation devices, as well as providing incentives that encourage members to help balance supply and demand, are additional avenues to help control consumption.

Lastly, recognizing that many members struggle to pay their bill, continuing to budget and plan for sustaining the energy assist program is essential.

8. **What role should OPALCO play in the overall sustainability of our island communities?**

OPALCO must lay the groundwork for a well-functioning utility for years to come. Specifically, to:

- Emphasize long-term planning which has important impacts on long-term costs.
- Ensure infrastructure aligns with the county's goals and remains cost effective to operate.
- Educate and remain transparent with members about what the organization can and cannot do.
- Stay abreast of emerging energy policies, funding sources and technologies.

9. **How aggressive should OPALCO be in pursuing new technologies and energy solutions?**

OPALCO should pursue a strategy of creating shovel-ready, approved sites to position itself to secure grant funding which it can use to explore the viability of new technologies in our unique island environment.

For example, the Salish Sea has been identified as a region with high potential to extract tidal energy. The predictability of tidal energy, and its potential to produce relatively consistent power, make it an attractive energy source for balancing the grid relative to other renewables. Energy storage systems –effectively buffers between variable generation and variable load – offer another evolving technology I would advocate for ongoing test and measure investment.

ROCK ISLAND

1. **How important is broadband connectivity to economic development and quality of life in SJC?**

I believe broadband in the 21st century must be viewed as electricity was in the 20th century. While it's natural to think of 'internet' and 'electricity' as two different services, the backbones behind each will continue to rapidly blend into an Internet-enabled smart grid. Thus, broadband connectivity is vital for enabling OPALCO to cost effectively manage the community's mix of energy and communication services.

Additionally, high-speed internet access confers significant benefits for rural communities – telemedicine, remote work, distance learning – whereas areas without broadband are much more likely to face disadvantages.

2. **What is your vision for providing communication technology throughout SJ County?**

Recognizing the significant capital investment required to build communications infrastructure, my vision is to explore innovative public-private partnerships, financing models and member incentives designed to accelerate the current buildout.

My experience installing broadband on Lopez revealed that residents have considerably more questions than answers, ranging from what's possible to the role of T-Mobile. Step one would be to turn up the communications volume and specificity on where/how/what's available and identifying local points of contact to lead new fiberhoods.

3. What value do you add to assist Rock Island in realizing that vision?

During the past year I worked closely with Rock Island's leadership to design, build consensus within the local area, and install fiber cable through a section of Lopez Island. From this firsthand experience I now understand the questions and concerns that members have, I see how extending the fiber network could be approached more programmatically, and I know the litany of practical challenges involved. I'm also a former executive at WatchGuard, a network security provider whose products protect computer networks from outside threats, and bring a thorough technical understanding of internet infrastructure.