

## Opalco Q & A

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

In a perfect world – we would continue with 100% clean energy (mostly hydro). Unfortunately, the world of energy is far from perfect.

There are forces at work, many of which are positive and steering us in the right direction from a climate perspective. The removal of coal from energy generation over the next five years is a positive. And yet, effecting the right steps to reduce carbon will increase demand on other sources (hydro).

We need to replace (locally and regionally) the energy generation we lose from coal. OPALCO is leading the development of ‘community solar’ and encouraging the development of ‘member rooftop solar’. Both of these should increase significantly over the next 5 – 10 years.

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

There are extensive (and lengthy) documents on the OPALCO website (The Integrated Resource Plan and The Long-Range Plan) that address this very question. Reading them is an education in understanding the complexity of achieving energy reliability and self-sufficiency in San Juan County.

OPALCO is seeking to encourage, build, or create green energy (primarily but not exclusively solar for now). The Community Solar installation on Decatur Island is an example. If we could replicate (say three larger such installations) – we will create 3.0 megawatts of energy for our community. While the benefit of solar is larger in

summer – it does add to our energy resource. Individual rooftop solar installations on commercial or residential buildings may be facilitated by incentives (tax credits from Federal government and/or inexpensive financing from sources to be determined). Members get to decide if solar installations hold good economics in their personal situations – but if we are thinking long term about climate issues, then for many this will be a good option.

As other sources of energy become financially viable, OPALCO must be ready to develop those as well (e.g., tidal power and perhaps wind power). To successfully meet the potential demand for energy in SJC – OPALCO must be insightfully proactive – looking out over the horizon and moving quickly when opportunity presents.

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

Hydro power is the single most important source of energy – now and in the future. However, hydro power supply will not increase in the future – it is pretty much capacity constrained. In fact, our supply of green energy from hydro may very well decrease after 2028 as we compete with California’s huge demand for energy. If global warming reduces snowpack and water availability for hydro generation, the hydro energy supply may decrease still further – with a negative energy impact not only in San Juan county – but throughout the western states.

Hydro power is a base load power source. As we increase the amount of solar (or other renewable clean energy) hydro will help keep the system stable and reliable during the day, at night, on cloudy days, during the summer, and in the winter. We need multiple sources of energy in the

decades ahead. All are important resources in the solution to our energy needs.

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

OPALCO is a relatively small utility, but we need to be engaged and involved in regional power discussions. We are (in some ways) unique as an island community – our needs and the impact of energy decisions could be overlooked if we are not present at the table.

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

We live in a beautiful community and are blessed indeed. Those who have lived here for 15, 20, or 25 years (or more) have witnessed changes that may be viewed negatively from an aesthetic perspective.

From our home in Eastsound we look east to Buck Mountain. Twenty years ago, there were but few lights at night. Over time many lots have been purchased with excessive clearing for a home to be built. When we look out now, it is a Christmas tree of lighting (at night). Regrettably this is part of growth in the island.

Energy is a critical and essential part of everyday life. Like water – we can't do without it. We seek dependable and cost-efficient energy. The vast majority of that energy comes from the mainland. However, in time, we need to add energy resources in our back yard. Community Solar is one option. Individual roof top Solar is another. Tidal power (when economical) in the future.

Drawing a line in the sand between energy resilience and aesthetics is not something I can truthfully define. It is a bit like the (short term) vacation rental issues now confronting our community. There are those who believe we have ‘too many visitors’ overwhelming our resources. And there others who view things from a different perspective. We will know when the line in the sand has been crossed – as our citizens will get active in speaking their mind.

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

Given our sourcing of power (mostly hydro) and the intermittent nature of solar, tide, and other sources – I do not see how San Juan country becomes energy independent (to the extent that implies we are fully self-sufficient). We will always depend on and need hydro power to *firm up* the need for energy when our renewables are not able to meet the electrical loads.

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

There are many things members can do and some things OPALCO can attempt to do.

First, members may affect conservation of energy in many ways. LED lights; electric water heating; electric home heating; electric vehicles; in short, *electrification of everything we can*. (Note: An electric vehicle with home charging will actually increase your electrical bills but decrease your fossil fuel bill by more). EV’s are more efficient and less expensive to maintain. Your electrical bill goes up, but you save money elsewhere.

Second, members can replace less efficient electrical appliances with newer and highly efficient appliances. Yes, there is a cost in doing so, but if we are ‘all in this together’ – everything helps.

Third, OPALCO encourages and incentivizes the effort to electrify everything. The ‘Switch it Up’ program helps make it affordable to make the changes in our energy usage. Check this out on OPALCO website – or call OPALCO if you have questions.

Finally, OPALCO has several fine programs to support low-income members with their electrical bills. The PAL, LIHEAP, and EAP are explained on the website and for those with needs – these programs for qualified members cover a substantial portion of their bill.

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

OPALCO is our member cooperative. We are part of OPALCO and OPALCO is part of our everyday life – we are partners in making the changes needed to achieve sustainability for the common good. We look to OPALCO to provide the leadership, identify the opportunities, and search out the incentives that will allow members to make informed choices.

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

Aggressive is an interesting posture.

We have a relatively small population and finite resources (people and funding). We should undertake only those projects that make good economic sense for the members collectively.

The Decatur member solar project was funded by members who invested *personal* dollars in the project. Those members reap the benefit of that investment. Other OPALCO members are not burdened by the capital committed to that project or the cost of administering it.

OPALCO should always be looking 'over the horizon' to anticipate if and when an energy related project makes 'good sense' for its members. And OPALCO needs to be positioned to 'move quickly' when funding becomes available to implement such projects.

In short, OPALCO must be proactive (aggressively so) about projects that increase energy resilience but act only when we are reasonably assured the benefits are real and tangible.

## **ROCK ISLAND**

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

I suppose one could ask another question: What would our economic development and quality of life be like *without* ROCK ISLAND?

Certainly, our lives during COVID 19 would have been dramatically 'less connected' without Rock Island. Daily ZOOM conversations and meetings would not have been 'quite the same' - if at all.

Beyond COVID 19 the confidence we all enjoy in our broadband provider (which should continue to improve over time) will enable individuals and businesses to make decisions on 'how to live life' in our new world.

From a social perspective Rock Island contributes to the longer-term development of a 'local middle class'. As more islanders who live and work remotely spend increasing amounts of time actually working and rearing families here – their contribution to our local businesses will help us move toward a less seasonal economy. As islanders who own property and work here spend their time and money in the islands – the economics will begin to shift positively with more full-time jobs that support the lives of others. It may be hard to discern these trends early on, but the groundwork is in place to move in this direction.

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

First, let's acknowledge that a substantial amount of progress has been made in the past 5-6 years – as a result of having fiber. And let's be clear as well that Fiber is the Endgame in the sense that we would love (in time) to have everyone with 100% fiber.

Second, the installation of fiber has positively impacted and improved our digital and analog radio communications; our schools; the entire county infrastructure; cellular for customers; and business services as well.

So, my vision would be to continuously expand the availability and quality of everything Rock Island can and does provide – constant and never-ending improvement should be the goal.

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

When I examine OPALCO and Rock Island – I acknowledge the complexity of the financing that allows rural utilities (such as OPALCO) to operate and serve their communities. Few of us fully understand and appreciate the fine work OPALCO has done to fine tune the financing packages in place.

My background is strong in the financial arena – and I believe I will be able to contribute as a Board Member here.