



OPALCO and Rock Island are asking each San Juan County Council candidates questions concerning reliable energy and internet.

Please read the following background information so you can understand the critical power reliability issues that OPALCO is facing.

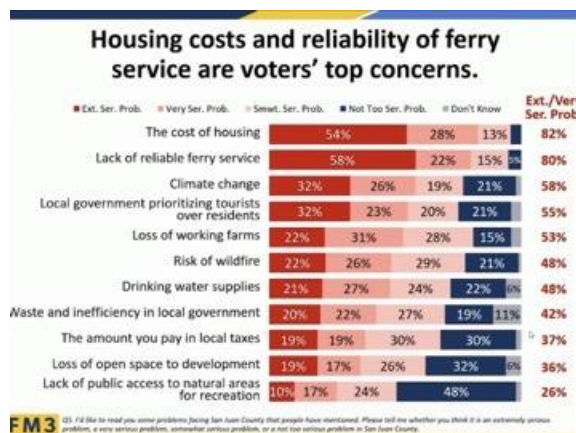
The energy world is changing dramatically due to climate impacts, carbon reduction legislation, and the transition toward renewable power. The goal of our state and nation is to transition away from fossil fuels and heat our homes and fuel our cars, trucks and ferries using electricity. This lofty goal is proving to be highly challenging.

The hydropower systems that have historically supplied most of the Pacific Northwest’s electricity are at capacity, coal plants in the region are scheduled to be shut down in the coming years and natural gas generation comes with a carbon-based financial penalty. Our dilemma is figuring out how to satisfy increased demand for electricity while our supply of carbon-free firm power is shrinking. As more coal plants shut down and are replaced with intermittent resources (solar and wind), energy blackouts are predicted. We need reliable power when the sun isn’t shining and the wind isn’t blowing.

Given our remote location, our best bet for clean and affordable firm power is to build renewable generation projects locally. One of our goals is to provide 4-hour back-up power in case the mainland grid goes down. However, our community will require about 40 renewable generation sites (like our site on Decatur) for this goal to be met. To be clear, achieving this goal requires a large influx in grant funding for us to build this many renewable generation projects AND strong member support.

As we build a local, renewable power supply on our beautiful islands, we face the cost of those projects, aesthetic trade-offs, and limited land for siting them.

We need a County Council that will work closely with OPALCO to realize a healthy, sustainable energy future in the islands. Please let us – all our ~12,000 co-op member-owners – know where you stand on ensuring reliable power and internet communications. Unfortunately, reliable energy isn’t even on our communities list of top concerns (see chart below).



Questions:

1. The current Utility Element (Section B8) in the Comprehensive Plan states: “Our community strives for energy independence...we use renewable energy.” To achieve this vision will require significant land and water areas to host local renewable energy power sites. What is your vision for the future of energy for San Juan County as a whole?
2. How would you direct County staff to prioritize this goal of energy independence (as referenced above) and facilitate implementation of these renewable energy sites?
3. What are you, as a candidate, doing to educate yourself on the complexities and impacts of energy policies on the citizens of San Juan County?
4. Ten years ago, when the county lacked sufficient broadband capacity, OPALCO and the county worked together to streamline land use and permit guidelines. This provided us with permitting certainty and allowed us to meet schedule obligations.

The Comprehensive Plan Update (Section B, Element 2, Land Use) speaks to land use for alternative energy resources and identifies essential public facilities. Would you support a similar permitting approach to development of provisional use codes for local, renewable energy facilities to provide essential services to the community?

5. Where will you draw the line between local energy resilience and island aesthetics?
6. Studies indicate that rooftop solar only provides a fraction of the energy needed to replace electricity lost from the elimination of fossil fuel generation. SJC Comprehensive Land Use Plan limits utility scale solar in agriculture areas and excludes utility scale solar be built in forested areas. Are you in favor of changing the comprehensive plan and land use tables to allow more renewable generation in the non-environmentally sensitive areas of SJ County? If so, how?
7. Given our need to also firm up local renewables with power generated on the mainland (when the sun doesn’t shine, wind doesn’t blow, and batteries are fully discharged), how important is hydropower in your vision of the County’s future energy supply?
8. Do you plan to encourage electrification of transportation in San Juan County, and if so, how?
9. In a chart above from San Juan County, of voters’ top concerns, power and internet service didn’t even make the list. How do we get citizens to prioritize these issues that are critical to the quality of life in the islands?
10. How will you address disparities in access to broadband services – especially for seniors in need of remote telemedicine, low-income members, and households with kids in school?