

OPALCO Board Candidate Questions

OPALCO's mission is to provide safe, reliable, sustainable and cost-effective essential utility services with a commitment to renewable resources and carbon reduction. How does this mission align with your vision for the cooperative and community?

This mission resonates deeply with me. I grew up watching my father engineer hydro-power systems - reliable, sustainable energy was never abstract to me. It was what kept communities functional and equitable. Here on Orcas Island, I see OPALCO living that same commitment. My vision is a co-op that leads the islands into an energy-resilient future without leaving any member behind - not just surviving the energy transition, but using it as an opportunity to strengthen community bonds and member ownership.

Where will OPALCO get the capital to invest in required system upgrades and local renewable generators?

A multi-pronged approach is essential: federal grants and IRA/clean energy incentive programs, low-interest USDA Rural Utilities Service loans, member-funded community solar investments (as OPALCO has demonstrated with the Decatur Island project), and strategic partnerships with BPA and state agencies. We should also explore revenue bonds for infrastructure. As a board, our job is to pursue every available capital channel while ensuring the co-op's debt load remains prudent and member rates stay manageable.

How should OPALCO maintain affordability for all members while complying with decarbonization legislation?

Affordability and decarbonization aren't necessarily in conflict - efficiency is the bridge. We should aggressively pursue grants and incentives to offset capital costs before they hit rates. Energy efficiency programs (heat pump rebates, weatherization, etc) reduce member consumption and lower bills. Tiered assistance programs like the existing Energy Assist Program must be preserved and expanded. And we must engage legislators honestly about the cost-of-service realities facing island cooperatives to secure fair treatment under state mandates.

Solar power requires sunny land, and existing county codes favor preserving rural character. How do you balance these conflicts, and how can OPALCO work with San Juan County to ensure permitting certainty?

This is one of the most tangible challenges OPALCO faces, as we saw with the Bailer Hill project. I believe the county's Essential Public Facilities designation is a key pathway - it doesn't override community values, but it ensures utility infrastructure can't be outright blocked. OPALCO should be a proactive partner with the county: co-developing siting criteria that respect rural character, exploring dual-use land (brownfields, parking lots, rooftops), and investing in early community engagement so projects don't arrive as surprises. Permitting certainty requires trust, and trust is built before the applications are filed.

How do you engage stakeholders who show up frustrated with the cooperative? What do you do when their claims conflict with engineering/economic reality?

I listen first, genuinely. Frustration usually signals something real: a bill that feels unfair, a decision that wasn't explained well, or a fear about the future. My engineering background taught me that problems have root causes, and dismissing a complaint rarely surfaces them. Once I understand what's driving the frustration, I'm direct and honest about the technical and economic constraints. I don't sugarcoat hard truths, but I also make sure people understand the "why" before I explain the "can't." Transparency builds credibility even when the answer isn't what someone wants to hear.

Load growth will double by 2050 due to electrification of heating and transportation. Where should new energy come from? Where should projects be located? Will local resistance limit siting? Who pays?

New energy should come primarily from local solar, battery storage, and emerging resources like tidal energy (as OPALCO's Rosario Strait pilot explored). Wind and geothermal should be evaluated where feasible. Projects should be sited on lower-sensitivity lands first - industrial zones, rooftops, parking facilities - with careful community engagement for any open land proposals. Local resistance is real and predictable; proactive education and inclusive planning processes are the mitigation. Costs should be distributed equitably: member rates, grants, and state/federal programs should share the burden, protecting lower-income households from disproportionate impact.

OPALCO collects almost half of revenue through the kWh charge, but efficiency and renewables will erode that revenue. How would you address this rate structure dilemma?

This is a structural problem that utilities nationwide are grappling with. The solution is to gradually shift more of the fixed cost recovery to a fixed monthly charge while maintaining a meaningful per-kWh signal that rewards efficiency. This must be done carefully and transparently, rate restructuring affects fixed-income and low-use members differently. I'd support a phased approach with member input, safeguards for low-income households, and clear communication about why the change is necessary. Burying fixed costs in the kWh rate is not sustainable as consumption patterns shift.

What are three things you don't know about running a utility that you plan to learn first?

1. The details of OPALCO's Integrated Resource Plan and long-range capital planning process - I want to understand the full financial model and infrastructure roadmap.
2. FERC and state regulatory compliance specifics - the legal and regulatory constraints that shape what the board can and can't direct management to do.
3. The nuances of BPA wholesale power contracting - how OPALCO's power purchase agreements are structured, what flexibility exists, and what the risk exposure looks like under various future scenarios.

The high cost of living and competitive labor market make hiring and retention difficult. What ideas can you offer?

Having built technology teams in competitive markets, I know that compensation must be competitive, but it's rarely the only lever. Housing is an existential barrier in the islands; I'd support OPALCO actively exploring workforce housing partnerships, potentially through the co-op's land trust relationships. Remote and hybrid roles where feasible, clear career development paths, and a culture of mission-driven work all matter. The co-op's values: community ownership, sustainability, are genuine differentiators for the right candidates. We should lean into that identity in recruiting.

A severe winter event causes regional scarcity and wholesale price spikes. What questions do you ask management? What do you communicate to members?

I ask management: What is our exposure - duration, magnitude, hedging position? What is the projected bill impact per member tier? What emergency assistance levers do we have? What can we do operationally to reduce demand or source alternatives? For members, I believe in early, honest communication, don't wait until the bills arrive. Explain what happened, why, what OPALCO is doing about it, and what assistance is available. People can handle hard news when they feel respected and informed. Silence breeds distrust.

Member engagement is key to a successful cooperative. How would you encourage greater participation?

OPALCO is member-owned, but most members don't feel that ownership day-to-day. I'd push for more accessible engagement: digital town halls, multilingual outreach, youth engagement programs, and visible feedback loops where members can see their input reflected in decisions. Technology can lower the barrier significantly. I'd also advocate for storytelling, showing members the real-world impact of their co-op's work on the islands they love. When people see themselves in the mission, they show up.

ROCK ISLAND

How important is access to communication technology throughout San Juan County?

It's foundational. In the modern economy, broadband is as essential as electricity. Remote work, telehealth, education, emergency services, and small business viability all depend on reliable connectivity. For an island community with geographic and economic isolation challenges, the absence of broadband is not just an inconvenience, it's a barrier to equity and economic resilience.

Rock Island provides internet to nearly 60% of OPALCO membership. How should Rock Island and OPALCO prioritize reaching the balance of the membership?

The remaining 40% likely includes the hardest-to-reach members, geographically remote, lower-income, or on smaller islands. That's exactly where the co-op model should shine. I'd prioritize a phased buildout plan with explicit coverage targets, leveraging federal broadband infrastructure funding (BEAD program, e-connectivity grants) to serve uneconomic areas that private providers will never reach. This is a mission-aligned use of Rock Island's role in the community.

Who should pay for the cost of internet connections?

A combination of sources: federal and state broadband grants should shoulder the capital cost for underserved areas. Members should pay fair, transparent rates for service. Low-income members should have access to subsidized tiers - similar to the federal ACP model. The co-op structure means Rock Island isn't optimizing for shareholder returns; it's optimizing for community coverage. That changes the calculus on cross-subsidization in ways a private ISP wouldn't accept.

What would you bring to the co-op to help Rock Island realize its full vision?

I bring direct experience building technology infrastructure at scale - from Nokia's Symbian platform to IoT systems at Pillsy/Optimize Health. I understand how to architect systems that are resilient, scalable, and maintainable with lean teams. I also bring a startup operator's mindset: move fast, be rigorous about what matters, and don't let perfect be the enemy of connected. I'm deeply committed to ensuring every member of this community, regardless of where they live or what they earn, has access to the connectivity that makes full participation in modern life possible.