



Jefferson County
Public Utility District

Public Power, Local Services,
Community Connections.

March 2019 Newsletter

WHAT EXACTLY IS BROADBAND, AND WHO HAS IT?

Most people know if they have internet service. Whether or not they have broadband can be harder to determine.

For a fixed, wired internet service to be considered “broadband” by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), it must have the ability to deliver download speed of 25 megabytes per second (mbps) and upload speeds of 3mbps.

Wired broadband service can be delivered by fiber, coaxial cable, or even copper wire as long as it has the potential to meet prescribed speeds.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) currently self-report both their delivered speeds and coverage areas to the FCC. Using that self-reported data, the FCC concluded that at the end of 2016, 92.3% of Americans had access to broadband internet.

However, according to a study by Microsoft, cited by the New York Times in a December 2018 article titled “Digital Divide is Wider Than We Think,” only half of Americans are using the internet at speeds approaching the broadband rate, and many areas in the US considered by the FCC as having broadband,

especially rural areas, do not.

The problem, as stated in a post on Microsoft’s website titled “Better Broadband Data Can Lend a Voice to Rural Americans,” is that ISPs “are only required to report areas where they *could* hypothetically deliver broadband access, not just the areas where they *actually* do provide broadband access.”

The New York Times article focuses on Microsoft’s work in Ferry County, WA. 100% of Ferry County is considered as having access to broadband by the FCC, while Microsoft estimates that only 2% of the population use it. The mayor of Republic, in Ferry County, is quoted saying “we don’t really have broadband coverage across the county.”

Jefferson County does not have 100% access to broadband either. The FCC’s 2016 year end report says only 81% of Jefferson County residents have access to broadband. What Jefferson County residents actually have or use has not been fully surveyed, but will be soon.

As part of a strategic planning process the PUD has undertaken to

determine possibilities for expanding access to broadband infrastructure, the PUD is partnering with Team Jefferson EDC and others to survey households & businesses about how they connect to and use the internet.

The survey will be available online late March through April. This is not the same survey the PUD issued in 2017. Data gathered will help guide decisions about locating future fiber, and will help support applications for federal and state broadband infrastructure grants.

Per state law, PUDs cannot provide retail internet service to end users. PUDs can build telecommunications infrastructure for both internal use and for wholesale lease to ISPs who provide the retail service to end users.

The PUD owns over 45 miles of fiber optic cable. About half connects to community institutions and businesses, and half is used to monitor and control electrical infrastructure. For more info, and to take the survey later this month, visit the Broadband tab on our website.

REPORTING TREES IN POWER LINES

This winter, PUD customers experienced quite a few outages due to trees and branches interacting with power lines. Now that winter is over, we need your help to prevent more outages from occurring next year as those trees and branches begin to start growing again. Though you can report trees and branches in contact, or potential contact, with power lines by calling customer service, **the best way to report** is to use the automated form on our website at jeffpud.org/report-tree-problem. You can report the issue, the location and upload photos of the problem tree right from your phone, on the scene. Please see the back of this newsletter to identify the type of line on a power pole that might be affected. Not all lines on the pole deliver power, some are phone or cable lines that lease space on PUD poles. Noting which lines are impacted helps us gauge the priority of the response.

MEETINGS/EVENTS

Regular meetings of the PUD Board of Commissioners occur monthly on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays at 5pm.

Meetings of the PUD’s Citizen Advisory Board are held at 2pm on the second Monday of each month.

Commissioner and Citizen Advisory Board meetings are open to the public and are held at the Jefferson Transit Board Room at 63 Four Corners Rd. *Check our website for more details or changes.*

District 1 Commissioner: **Jeff Randall**
District 2 Commissioner: **Ken Collins**
District 3 Commissioner: **Dan Toepper**
Kevin Streett, Acting General Manager

UNDERGROUND vs OVERHEAD LINES

After storms and outages, many customers ask why the PUD doesn't put more of its lines underground. After all, the number one reason the power goes out is because of the wind blowing trees and branches into powerlines.

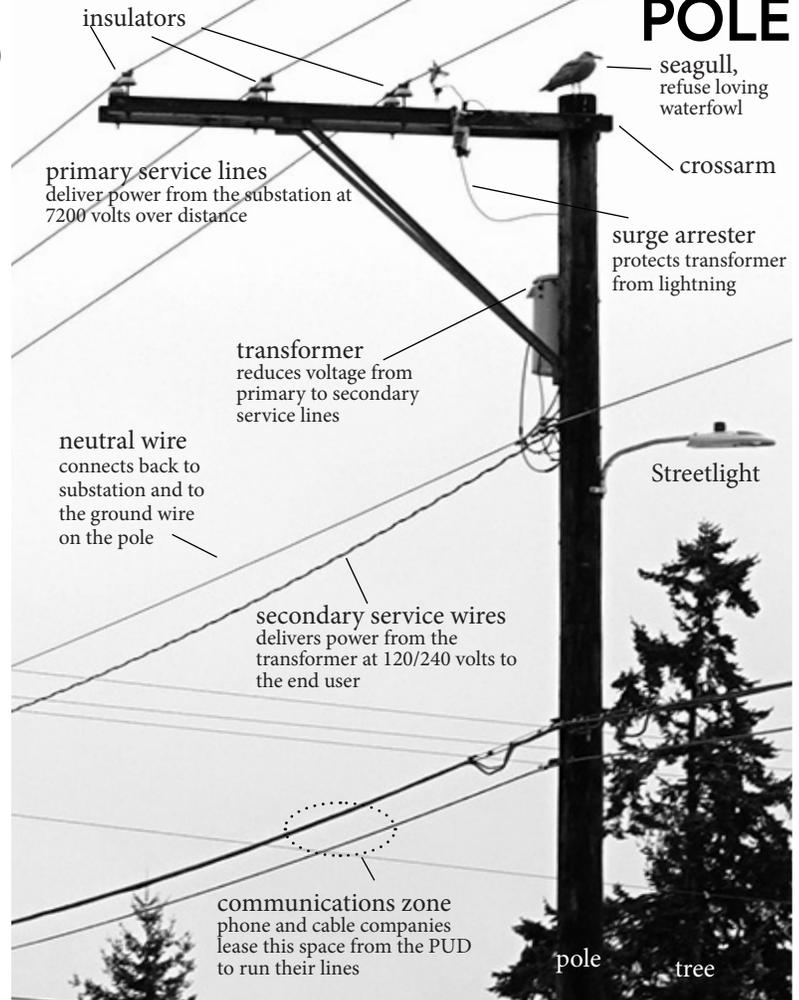
Of the PUD's 765 miles of electrical lines across the county, 373 run overhead on power poles and 392 miles are buried underground, either directly in the dirt, or run through conduit.

According to Senior Electrical Engineer Jimmy Scarborough, underground electrical lines are often the better choice from a reliability standpoint, but have drawbacks that lead the PUD to stick with overhead wires in some scenarios.

The reason not to put lines underground generally has to do with price. Scarborough estimates it costs 2-3 times as much to put primary service lines underground rather than to run them overhead on poles. It's also more expensive to repair lines that are buried underground, and they take longer to fix than lines above ground. Underground faults are also more difficult to locate. The PUD must call in excavating contractors to dig up the line before a crew can access the wire to make the repair.

In residential and commercial new construction, the PUD generally does prefer that powerlines are placed underground. In the City of Port Townsend, this is required in the code. Outside of the city it is advised but not mandated.

ANATOMY OF A POWER POLE



HOW SHUTOFFS HAPPEN/HOW TO AVOID THEM

The PUD does everything it can to help customers avoid losing their utility services.

Shutoffs for non-payment, when they occur, only come at the end of a lengthy process, with many notifications and chances to avoid shutoff along the way.

The soonest a shutoff can occur is 56 days after the original bill for service is generated. Payment for that bill must be received within 21 days of generation, which is the "payment due date," and is printed on the bill, not 21 days after it is received or opened.

If the payment is not received within 3 business days of the printed due date, the customer is charged a

\$5 late fee on the next bill, which is generated approximately 30 days after the last bill. If payment has not been received in the 14 days after the original due date, the customer will receive a termination notice.

If payment has not been received 49 days after the first statement was generated, the customer will then receive an automated call notifying them of the potential shutoff. If there is no phone number associated with the account, a door hanger will be left on the premises.

If no payment is received by day 56, the customer will be shutoff. Shutoffs will not occur for accounts that owe less than \$75. If the date of a shutoff falls on a Friday, Saturday,

Sunday, or Holiday, the PUD will postpone the disconnect to the following business day. Shutoffs may also be postponed for weather.

Customer Service does everything it can to work with customers to avoid shutoff. We offer low-income support, payment plans, online payment, and the Rainy Day funding program via our partnerships with OlyCAP and the Society of St. Vincent De Paul which supports our most at-risk customers.

If you are struggling to pay your bill, don't wait to let us know.

Call Customer Service as soon as you can at **(360) 385-5800**, Monday through Friday, 9am-4:30pm.

We are here to help.

