



October 21, 2021

Chris Wolfe – Oral Comments to OPALCO Board

What we are asking for is to not rush this change and to involve member stakeholders more collaboratively. OPALCO actually had a good model for stakeholder engagement with the Energy Roundtable that used to meet regularly to discuss various energy topics. This process has felt much more one-sided, as an audience trying to follow OPALCO presentations and assumptions to various analyses, rather than interactive problem solving and discussion process.

And there are still a lot of other members who don't understand all the implications of these changes, even after attending the solar town hall presentations. The last Solar Town hall generated 45 questions and 6 comments related to the solar rate change. Members in attendance had more questions than answers, and are still seeking to understand the proposed changes.

The proposed change will of course affect our business, our employees, our customers – we'll do our best, as you have to be pretty tough to be a small business owner here in the islands. With this proposal, we are now faced with going back to customers to give them the option of cancelling projects.

But the bigger and more important concern is that this short-sighted policy change will have long-term impacts in the future for local renewable energy generation, climate change mitigation, and yes, for our Southern Resident orca population. Everything matters. This is the big unknown and the real issue. I sit on the Board of the Friends of the San Juans because these issues matter a lot to me, and I spent more than a decade with Environmental Defense Fund working with industry on solutions that make differences. These policy changes are like steering a big ship – it took a lot of effort to get the ship going in the right direction in the first place, so if you change direction along the way, you better hope you have enough time and strength to get it going the right way again. Will OPALCO really be on track, by disincentivizing solar installations, to meet its goal of 30% of power needs with local solar and storage by 2040?

In summary, we are requesting that the board convene a community stakeholder group to work with OPALCO staff more closely on this issue – this would allow for 2-way conversations about an important topic, rather than the one-sided presentations that OPALCO has given. Community stakeholders commit to more in-depth participation to better understand the underlying analyses, discuss assumptions, talk about alternatives, and through this process, you can often find a way forward that has both community buy-in and support. These efforts are an investment in finding the best solution.

Thank you for your time.