

As the wind blows... or as the tree falls...

We had a couple of electrical issues this last month. As you may know, our substation is quite old – did you know it was given its color by Lady Bird Johnson?! The substation itself is owned and maintained by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), while the City of Milton's own electric crew maintains the lines. The specific line that extends from the substation up through a ravine to Milton was the issue during this last outage. Cottonwood trees on private property had grown up in this ravine, and it was already in the work plan to take these trees down – unfortunately, the soggy rain-filled soil moved that timeline up, after causing much of Milton to lose power for a short time.

Normally, one tree, one line, is not that big of a deal. Normally, our crews respond and quickly the power is restored, almost seamlessly! Normally..., but this time it was the feeder line, the line directly from the old substation leading to the whole city. The tree hit all three lines, pulled them down and tripped the breakers in the substation. Then, those breakers didn't want to come back on. This is about as technical as I can get on the subject.

City Council, city staff, and I have had this issue on our radar for a while. Plans are already in place to have a second and maybe even a third feeder line from other power suppliers online soon, to give us more options, including Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) as a substation backup. We've also been discussing the need to remodel the substation, as well as whether to purchase it ourselves. The Pros and Cons: Pro, if we own it, we maintain it; Con, if we own it, we have to be the ones to maintain it! Last year we had a consulting firm look at all this and begin to advise us. The report is in the February 8, 2016 Council packet (on our new website) if you would like to dive into the details. It's called an Electric Utility Strategic Plan and has very little to do with rates. We will spend a lot of time on this subject this year; if this interests you, please join us for Monday night council meetings.

A little perspective ... we enjoy a lot of comforts in Milton. Our power almost never goes out, and when it does, our crews have it back on almost immediately.

The City of Milton employs almost 50 employees.

What would it be like if we didn't? Well, we would have to wait – we would wait a little longer before the police closed the street and secured the situation – we would wait for power to be restored – we would wait for communication on how the emergency was affecting all the things we use electricity for, such as our water wells, phones, and everything else.

We are blessed in Milton, we have employees to take care of all that and to take care of us. Thank you for doing such a good job.