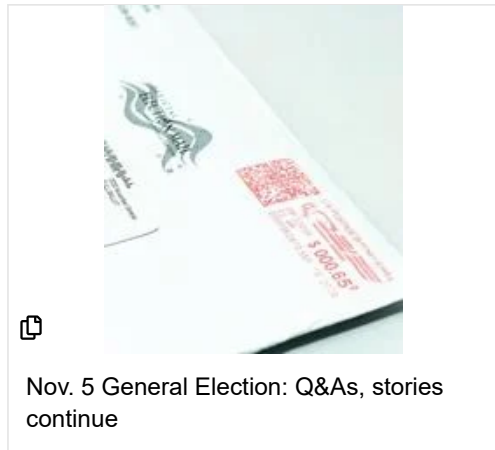


Nov. 5 General Election: Skamania County Public Utility District

Oct 15, 2024



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Nov. 5 General Election: Q&As, stories continue



Maria Mel Steele
Candidate, Skamania County PUD

Maria Mel Steele

Why are you running?

The rates and fee appear to be *unfair* and *unjust*. Ratepayers and businesses have issues in common and they need to be resolved. Current management is allowing outside sources to perform cost of service Studies and it is being mis-used. Ratepayers are not made aware with proper effective disclosures. I have a plan with a great success potential for oversight of PUD and better represent PUD ratepayers.

What are your qualifications for this position?

The Skamania County Public Utility District commissioner position is the most important position on the ballot — best of knowledge. I say this because my life has prepared me for regulating the local PUD. Being born into a PUD family and retiring from a lifetime of being a United States public civil servant of natural resources, and my last six years of supporting Skamania County ratepayer's homes and businesses, has fully qualified me to hit the ground running. With more than 3,000 hours of document requests from Skamania PUD, calculating successfully means reducing utility bills consistent with PUD's *original mission* while *reducing debt*, overseeing each and every PUD meeting in last six years, presenting dozens of power points for public, newspaper articles, collaborating with PUD, Skamania residents, Washington State departments, United States departments of energy, etc., has all contributed to my experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

What are the top three issues facing the Skamania County Public Utility District?

1. Need to increase public disclosures: Educate the public and provide options in Skamania County about PUD services. Major capital projects and other important information is not effectively disclosed.
2. Need to manage by original PUD mission: Revert definitions of BaseRate pre-2019 and therefore lower currently unfair and unjust fix fees and reduce debt by utilizing long-standing standards of tiering, thus paying more for non-conservation of power and water uses.
3. Reduce PUD debt trajectory: Circa 2019 management changed from "fix it if it is broke" to "replace everything because it's old" without documentation to justify such. There is need to reduce spending by insisting on cost/benefit analysis. This did not happen with 2019-2024 rate hearing/cost of service, which assumed numerous capital project expenditures. Also need to have fair and competitive cost/benefit wise for contract awards while recognizing union workers capabilities first with union contracts.

What is an innovation you would recommend?

Add incentives: Convert penalties into incentives for bill paying and solar-wind net metering. Reduce permits for power and water new installs for development for alternative homes for low cost homes. This is a way to add on more union jobs and increase sustainable customers.

Finish this statement: In six years, my vision for the The Skamania County Public Utility District is ...

Compliant with all laws on state and federal level.

Debt is significantly reduced. I do support by all measures BPA and Bonneville Dam hydro and consider it the best energy source. It makes use of nature's power of the river. They balance both federal and private markets and wholesale for only 3.5 cents/kilowatt with BPA produced portions with minimal environmental impacts. Our rate of delivery for retail goal to revert to twice wholesale, i.e., 3.5 cents x 2 = 7 cents, and base rates are at \$8 for essential living. Tiering rates are to be implemented fairly and justly.

Ratepayers are pleased with PUD.

I do support fossil fuels, natural gas, and other essential needs for the people and essential businesses with proper cost/benefits. Proper environmental analysis is necessary for new extractions. Allow home to be as versed as practical. Existing production of energy continues efficiencies. International exports limited so to have for domestic use.

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Dan Boyes, also running for Skamania County PUD, did not respond by press deadline. Any responses received before the Nov. 5 election will be included in upcoming editions.