This month, the Grays Harbor PUD Board of Commissioners will consider a budget for 2019 that will include $9.1-million in capital expenditures. The budget outlines costs for the maintenance and upkeep of the PUD system, new customer connections, the installation of new equipment and improvements to utility facilities.

"While the total capital investment makes up less than 10% of our overall budget, that amount is what makes so much of what we do possible," said General Manager Dave Ward. "The safety and reliability of the PUD system is at the core of our mission to our customers. Our capital budget makes that happen."

Nearly three quarters of every dollar spent on capital improvements will go to the replacement of aging equipment, including aerial and underground transmission and distribution lines, hundreds of utility poles, and substation transformers and circuit breakers. In 2019, the utility plans to invest $2-million into the PUD transmission system, $3.9-million into the distribution system and $1.4-million into its substation network.

"Our engineering and operations crews have worked together to identify the work that needs to be addressed now to keep our system working in the way our customers expect," said Engineering Director Schuyler Burkhart. "We started with a $14.8 million project total and worked it down to a responsible amount we can afford."

The remainder of the proposed capital budget is dedicated to general plant improvements, including telecommunications, facilities, IT systems, fleet and tools, which will see a total investment of $1.75-million. These improvements will be partially funded with grant dollars, secured by the utility to improve the telecom network used by local internet service providers.

Overall, the proposed 2019 capital budget shows an increase of 11.5% over 2018, which is a reflection of gradual improvements in the PUD’s financial state. While the needs, value and estimated life of the system call for the PUD to spend between $12-million and $13-million on its upkeep, the utility is recommending that the Board gradually work toward that total as finances improve, rather than increase spending in a way which would mean a larger increase in customer rates.
PUD Commissioners Urge Legislative Fix to Carbon Emissions

Citing an unclear rule making procedure, loss of local control and the desire for a legislative answer to carbon emissions, the Grays Harbor PUD Board of Commissioners have passed a resolution opposing Initiative 1631. The initiative, which will appear on the November ballot, would attach a fee to carbon emissions if approved by a simple majority of Washington voters.

“We recognize that carbon emissions have a damaging impact on our environment and take pride in our environmental leadership through the PUD’s reliance on emission free hydro-electric and nuclear power,” said Commission President Arie Callaghan. “However, this initiative paints an unclear picture of our future. It wrests local control away from public utilities and places it in the hands of an appointed board without any assurance of utility input. That goes against the core principal of a PUD.”

“We want to work with the environmental community to find a solution to carbon emissions, but the best solution would come through a joint effort with the Washington State legislature, not an initiative that was written without input from all the parties involved,” said Commission Vice President Russ Skolrood.

“While there are some positive points to a fee on carbon emissions, there are too many unknowns in I-1631 for the utility to support it,” said Commission Secretary Dave Timmons. “Let legislators work with utilities, industries and the environmental community in 2019 to come up with a solution to carbon emissions that the entire state can rally behind and continue Washington’s positive role in environmentally friendly energy production.”

PUD Opens Enrollment for Utility Academy

What makes up the PUD telecommunications infrastructure? How does the PUD purchase it’s power? How did the PUD come into existence? Who make up the PUD crews and how do they respond to an outage? Those and other questions will be answered as your Grays Harbor PUD proudly offers its 2019 Citizen Utility Academy. If you are interested in learning more about your PUD and are willing to attend four, two-hour classes, contact the PUD at (360) 532-4220. Names and phone numbers will be taken and as soon as we have reached enough interested participants to fill a class, you will be contacted with time and location for the events. Come learn about your PUD!!!
PUD Celebrates Customers and Public Power

In October, the Grays Harbor PUD joined over 2000 public utilities across the country in celebrating Public Power Week. The week is designated by the American Public Power Association each year to recognize the local control, low costs and other benefits of public power to its customers. In Grays Harbor, the festivities include the Customer Appreciation Drive-Thru, held on October 10th. Customers were treated to an early morning cup of coffee, cookie and PUD goodie bag along with a hearty thank you from the PUD volunteers who staffed the booth. In addition, PUD staff will begin making visits to local city, county and other organizations who collaborate with the utility to deliver the PUD’s annual report.

Above right: Four legged customers were also able to get a tasty snack during Public Power Week.

Right: Members of the PUD volunteer to man the Customer Appreciation Drive Thru.

Below left: The PUD Drive Thru saw customers come away with a cup of coffee and PUD goody bag.

Below right: Hoquiam City Administrator Brian Shay starts the morning off with a visit to the PUD.
Maintaining the PUD System

By Arie Callaghan, District One Commissioner

There are many things that factor in to maintaining a safe and reliable electrical system for the residents of Grays Harbor. The system that the Grays Harbor PUD owns and maintains is comprised of some 2,200 miles of lines both above and below ground, 33,000 poles and the entire supporting infrastructure including substations, circuits, tools and vehicles. The wet climate in Grays Harbor, the trees and vegetation, all add cost to keeping our system maintained to the highest standards. This year the crews have already changed out 550 poles and expect to hit nearly 800 by years end. Tree trimming and vegetation management are a large part of the budget and pay huge dividends when storm season gets in full swing. In addition to weather, the climate of Grays Harbor must also be taken into account when we consider our system. The damp climate and salt air exposes the system to corrosion, which can shorten the life of many materials. However, the PUD balances when the infrastructure is nearing the end of its working life, the cost of replacement, as well as the safety of our customers and crew to determine what gets updated and when. It really comes down to a war with the elements to keep our system maintained to a high standard. To that end there is a lot involved in keeping the lights on. The team at the PUD are committed to doing a great job and maintaining this asset for our community.

Transformers Honor Carl Jonsson, Assist Habitat for Humanity

The Grays Harbor PUD Transformers assisted Habitat for Humanity in October in the rebuilding of a home on Harding Road in South Aberdeen. The PUD based community action group installed siding and made a $200 donation to Habitat for Humanity to pay for supplies used on the project. The day is part of the Carl Jonsson Memorial Day of Service, named in honor of former PUD employee Carl Jonsson, a dedicated community advocate and volunteer.