

GREEN SPRINGS BROADBAND COOPERATIVE

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Thursday, April 15, 2021

Dear GBC member,

It has been a while since we communicated — since forever if you are one of the many who have joined since we last met. This is not a good thing but, happily, it is not a disaster. The authorities are forgiving to organizations that fail to meet legal obligations like annual meetings. We need to take care of such details. More on that later.

First, the less-than-annual report (covering the past three years or so). State of the coop: we are in good shape. Our membership has grown steadily and is now north of 120. Generally speaking, we are able to provide good service to our members, with the usual caveats for trees that grow into our line-of-sight, batteries that run down when the sun don't shine and winter storms that ice our equipment on Soda Mountain. This is mountain life, folks.

Staffing has always been a constraint for our little tech enterprise. Currently, we have enough help to get by. Richard Holbo, our networking guru, recently faced down a health scare and is reconfiguring his life to afford him more time on the Green Springs. Norman Dean, our stalwart installer, is planning to decamp for Central Point. He will be able to cover many calls remotely and continues to handle many on-site needs. Between these two stalwarts, we are able to keep up with new installations and even address upgrades. For future initiatives, we are seeking an apprentice who is comfortable with basic engineering concepts, ladder-ready and eager to learn.

Money is not a problem. We have enough in the bank to serve our current membership and, possibly, to expand. See the attached balance sheet for our financial status as of February 28.

Our current priority is to maximize broadband quality for our existing members and add more members within our current service area. This means upgrading equipment for many of our early adopters. Wireless technology keeps getting better so gear that was state-of-the-art five years ago is now obsolete. We have sufficient resources to bring all of our members up to date with no additional charges required. For neighbors who have line of sight issues that we have not been able to solve, we are working on new strategies for bringing them online. Short runs of fiber-optic cable are one of the possibilities.

Once we consolidate our current operation and perhaps add some staff energy, we still intend to hop over some high ground and serve portions of our community that are still stuck with satellites or cell phone hotspots. Hyatt Lake, Howard Prairie and Dead Indian Memorial Highway are within reach. We can acquire sufficient bandwidth to double our current membership and provide even more reliable service to everyone. What is required to get there is human capital, which we hope to find within our own community.

The bottom line is that, on the operational side, we are providing decent service and aiming to do better. The organizational side needs some work. One step forward would be new blood at the leadership level. Speaking for myself, some of the old blood is aging out. Think about whether you are interested in stepping up to a board or officer position. We also need to incorporate as a rural cooperative. Federal cooperative status will cost something like \$10,000 in legal services, but incorporation will save that much annually in taxes. In other words, IRS status as a coop is an investment that will pay for itself in a year. Recognition as a rural utility cooperative will also open the door to new possibilities, should we choose to dream big.

What does 'dreaming big' mean for a rural utility coop? Think power. I mean the kind of power that lights up your house, runs your washing machine and makes those LEDs on your modem blink. Rural cooperative electric power providers are a well-established category of the US energy sector. A Green Springs Utilities Cooperative would be among the smaller of such entities, but it might make a lot of sense. Such a coop would have the right to acquire portions of the local grid, those poles and wires on your property and along the highway, from PPL. A local 'micro-grid' would give us the option of adding local production capacity, i.e. solar and wind, as well as local storage. This micro-grid could be charged in part by capacity that we would acquire from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), where the Northwest gets most of its juice. But it could be configured to cut itself off from the big grid in case of emergency. With local resources added, it could be more reliable than the current setup, which has been known to go down for days at a time. As the cost of renewables continues to decline, the price of independence could even be less than the price of PPL vassalage.

This is a heavy lift. Such an undertaking would take years of planning and considerable capital. But it could be fun. And when the Big One comes, it could be a life saver.

Let the discussion begin.

There is food for thought here, along with a number of action items. (See attached agenda.)

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One way or the other, a meeting is required. In our current circumstance, the meeting must be virtual. In fact, it must rely on the very broadband service that is the primary purpose of your GBC membership. Would you be available for a Zoom meeting on Sunday, April 25 at 3:00 PM? If the answer is definitely "NO," would the same time work on Sunday, May 2? If we get a lot of "NOs" to both dates, we will go back to the drawing board.

If you are not familiar with Zoom, we can provide technical assistance, most likely on a remote basis. If you have done it before, you know that it's not complicated. We email you a link and you click on it at the appointed time.

Best regards,

Diarmuid

PS We are working on a plan to post meeting materials and documents via our website, greensprings.us. Possibly we can also set up a voting function as well. We will keep you informed about these developments. In the meantime, you can RSVP or otherwise communicate with me at: diarmuidmcguire@gmail.com.