

Communications Report

The communications committee met twice during January, once on January 3d and again on January 15th. Committee members present for both meetings included Dick Nolan, Dick Peck, Arleen Boyd, Gretchen Nolan, and Deb Thomas. Roxie Melton could not attend.

The subject of both meetings was the redesign of our website. As Southern's bankruptcy moves rapidly towards a resolution, we need to educate our members about the possible consequences of the resolution and the tough decisions they may have to make. While we will use multiple methods to get members ready, the website is the only one that can provide information on a near real time basis. Our monthly magazine, Rural Montana, is currently read by more members, but its information is a month old by the time members read it. Given the relatively short period that remains until members may have to make critical decisions, we intend to use, and vigorously promote the use of, our website once it is redesigned to keep members informed.

On January 3d, the committee discussed my pending meeting with Banik Communications in Great Falls on January 10 and 11. Banik is the professional communications company we retained to help us with the redesign. Prior to my meeting, I highlighted every area in our website that we needed to improve to help co-op members find and understand information. I sent that effort to Banik as well as to each board and committee member.

During my meeting with Banik, I worked with Randi Szabo, Banik's task leader for our effort, and Heather Palermo who will maintain our site in the future. We spent most of our time methodically examining every part of the site, identifying improvements including a more logical organization of the site (known as a site map), and finally considering how fast the redesign could occur. In the last regard, we found a pending upgrade by Touchstone Energy's template for our website may delay the final redesign well into February 2013.

I finished my visit by discussing how Banik might help us encourage members to use our site after its redesign and, more broadly, how the company might help us manage our communication challenges going forward. Ms Szabo agreed that she needed to meet with the committee in Red Lodge before we proceeded with either of these efforts. That meeting will occur January 25th at 10am.

On January 15, the committee met to discuss the results of my meeting with Banik. Ms Szabo attended via conference call. We reviewed the proposed site map and made changes. We also agreed Banik would assume responsibility for maintaining the site on 1/21, a date which Dick Peck subsequently changed to 1/28 for operational reasons. I've attached the latest site map. Banik will begin making changes off line, while I edit text on the site to improve its the brevity and clarity. Committee members will see the result of both efforts before they appear on the site.

Richard Nolan
Communications Committee Chair
January 16, 2013

Revised January 15, 2013							
		Header Links					
BEARTOOTH LOGO		Preplanned Outages	Emergency 24/7 Phone	Office Contact (phone + email)	Access my account	Subscribe to Alerts	
		BLOG [TITLE TO BE DETERMINED] (may be Quick Link instead of header link)			FEEDBACK/SURVEYS (may be Quick Link instead of header link)		
HOME	ABOUT US	NEWS & EVENTS	CO-OP INFORMATION	ELECTRIC SERVICE	SAFETY	SAVE ENERGY SAVE MONEY	
<p>Breaking News</p> <p>[the latest articles will continue to go here - but RENAME headline for content/topic and source]</p> <p>- some may include link to BEC blog post interpreting the article's meaning and import</p> <p>- Post BEC news releases here as well</p>	About BEC BEC-Faets-2008-2010	Calendar (include next Bd. mtg agenda)	Cooperative Membership [rewrite]	New service Add member (not "consumer") explanation [rewrite] + link to form - see also "Electrical permits"	[Need brief intro = responsibility to the public and ourselves, etc.] - see also "Electrical permits"	Tools you can use to help lower your bill (also - how can Beartooth Electric help you)	
	History [write]	Background brief (QUICK LINK?)	Annual Report	Rates and Billing	Power line safety [existing]	VIDEOS about saving energy - more appeal (link to YouTube videos by Touchstone, gov't agencies or other free sources)	
	Annual Report	Current status brief (QUICK LINK?)	Bylaws by section - click to see all	Energy Assistance [edit]	Call before you dig [existing]	Equipment & Appliances [write - maintenance and replacement, etc.]	
	Board of Trustees - [reposition district descriptions]	Current News - reorganize - summaries - new titles where needed	Board Meeting Reports ["Report of Dec2012 Board Meeting"] - include minutes (with agendas in them) (click here for minutes) for legal reasons write exec summaries	Budget Billing	Tree Trimming [existing]	Avoid Energy Gobblers [write new - this is just an idea]	
LEFT SIDE BOX #1 PAYBILL - ACCESS MY ACCOUNT KEEP THIS - but promote e-bill pay sign up discount in the side show	Employee Directory	News Archive (articles from more than 2 months ago) - reorganize - summaries - new titles where needed	Committee Reports write exec summaries	Electrical Permits		Member Discount Store - EnergySavers.coop	
LEFT SIDE BOX #2 FREE Mobile App - calculate your energy costs - DOWNLOAD HERE	Service Area Description/Map -Districts descrip? -Your District/T rustee is listed on your monthly statement	News Releases [get these]	Financial Reports - [rename documents]	Transfer/ Disconnect [edit]		On-site Review or Meter Checks [rewrite]	
LEFT SIDE BOX #3 REPLACE KIDS ZONE You can save \$\$ in electricity costs - here's how... links to videos from Touchstone and other sources...(also under "Saving Energy")		Newsletters	Southern Montana Electric Reports - operating/financials - court exhibits here title + 1-line abstract	Upgrades/ Changes [edit]		Energy Calculators	
	Corporate Programs • Youth Programs - BEC Scholarship - MECA scholarship - Wash DC Tour - Get Charged! Curriculum - Kids Energy Activities		Brochures - title + 1-line abstract - include Renewable Energy topic				
			Forms - [some will link w/relevant page]				

			Policies -must be downloadable - divide into sections/hierarchy click here for all			
			2012 Member Survey			Quick links: —For Members (BLOG)*** —VOTE HERE (new survey or opinion poll plus pro and con arguments) — 2012 MEMBER SURVEY _ Youth Programs (?)
<p>SLIDE SHOW - ADD E-BILL PROMO TO SLIDE SHOW....ADD NEW MESSAGE/CONCEPTS WHEN THEY ARE DEVELOPED (SUCH AS RURAL MT AD) - need more content here specific to BEC - such as a photo of a member and a testimonial quote that is on message.</p> <p>Delete New Year message soon...</p> <p>No hyperlinks are currently possible in these images.</p>						
Keep next board meeting scheduled date...but link to agenda for that meeting.						
[currently scholarship information - delete or move]						
<p>WRITE AND PLACE SHORT PARAGRAPHS - make it apparent this is information they need to know</p> <p>1. The situation - brief background of the bankruptcy 2. The current status and what's happening next 3. (LATER WE CAN ADD - What this means to you - the options we face)</p>						
More information - customer service contact on log-in account page (currently roll-over)	Fix contact information in various pages(not Kaaren)	Do we want a Board Members Only password protected area: NO... remove Log In header link	Need more photo content - show members - crews - service - problem solving			MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS 2012 - move to Quick Link/Member information
Footer topics:						
	Downloads	Reports	Policies & Bylaws	Financials	Articles	Forms Brochures

*** We will want to find a great title for the Blog - let's brainstorm ideas: "Hot topics" "Must Read for Members" "Critical Issues" "You Should Know" "Notes from the Board" "Today's Perspective" "Talking about Your Power" "Sparking Discussion"

Guiding principles and agreed direction:
<p>Minimize the need to scroll. Titles must imply content. Use brief summaries to identify topics covered. Strive for logical organization visitors can intuit.</p>
<p>Provide a rewarding experience for visitors to the site. Provide information they need; and concern for their needs. Show that we will do something for you—this is your primary source for critical information that will affect you significantly. Foster renewed trust in the Board and their efforts to protect the interests of the membership. Inclusion—we are in this together.</p>
<p>Show a positive attitude; provide solutions and increase perception of BEC as problem-solving. Promote energy saving practices prominently.</p>
<p>Simplify - shorten - use bullets, subheads and pull-outs...make content easy to scan. Use a consistent vocabulary throughout. Make styles and color use consistent and meaningful.</p>
<p>Dick/Communications Committee will approve all rewrites before they are published.</p>
<p>Embed keywords in introductions and headlines.</p>

Web site process steps:

1. Organize and rename. Changes will begin now. Dick Nolan will spearhead editing and rewriting of content.
2. Handoff of maintenance to Banik on January 21. Banik will contact Kaaren after Dick Peck talks to her.
3. Co-op web builder template version 2.0 rolls out (Jan 28-30?)
4. Banik begins style changes on new version before it goes live
5. Audience testing of site and subsequent refinements

Policy Committee Report
January Board Meeting

The policy committee met Tuesday, January 8. Janet Luloff, Dave Peterson, Dick Peck, Roxie Melton (ex-officio) and Laurie Beers attended.

I did not notice that we had, in addition to a correct January policy committee date on our BEC calendar, an erroneous one. My apologies to committee member Deb Thomas.

Based on feedback from Larry Martin, our attorney, we're going to present, to him and the board, a packet comprising all employee-related policies. Because of some new policies, he also suggested logical renumbering.

At the January meeting, the committee did a final review, comparing all of our proposed employee policies to the existing BEC policies and, as a result, added some content from the BEC existing policies.

After that comprehensive review, we renumbered the in-progress policies. Some of the previously approved policies that we have presented in a more piecemeal fashion will be in the packet that goes to Larry Martin and the board next month.

We have two employee policies outstanding—insurance benefits and an updated dress code policy. Dick Peck has been working on employee insurance benefits and I asked Larry Martin to write a dress code for the committee to review at our February meeting.

Both Larry Martin and Dick Peck were prepared to try to complete their work on the outstanding policies for the January board meeting, but I decided to wait an additional month to present to the committee first. As soon as they are reviewed by committee and have any committee-proposed changes and needed formatting, we'll send the packet to the board and Larry Martin. Though the board has previously seen ~90% of the policy content in this proposed packet, it is a large amount of material.

We are hoping for attorney and board approval in February. Since this is the first time the employee policies in their entirety have been presented, it may be that something might come up.

Pat Hoffman resigned from the policy committee this month, to every other member's regret. We'll miss her thoughtful contributions.

Next two meetings of the policy committee:
Tuesday, February 12
Tuesday, March 12

Southern Report January 2013

Southern Operating reports show smaller negative cash flow for December (\$22,157) than November (\$1,015,262) when an approximately \$1 million property tax bill for HGS and a very large *Suppliers for Operating Costs* line item were presented. Southern received \$4,743,589 from members and non-members (IESS) for power and paid its suppliers approximately \$2,844,662 for power. The due diligence committee (see due diligence report) held a conference call with Southern's attorney, accountant, CPA, and auditor to better understand these operating report financials. Southern's attorney said the financials are not indicative of content of a plan that may be presented to the court for reorganization. We find it relevant to matters of debt and potential liabilities after bankruptcy resolution. The monthly reports show both accrued debt (for gas transportation, for example) and payments made to Prudential, which may impact the final assessment of HGS debt. The operating report for December is being posted on the BEC website.

On January 18 YVEC and Southern notified the court that they have reached an agreement to settle all claims in YVEC's case to leave Southern. The notice sets April 30 as the termination date of the Southern/YVEC power contract pending approval of the court. YVEC will pay Southern \$2.5 million to – an amount established after negotiation of claims and counter claims between the two parties. YVEC will take nine megawatts of WAPA allocations from the 20 megawatts Southern holds for its members. The filing asks for a court hearing on the matter on or before February 26.

YVEC's departure will leave the Southern load reduced by at least 36% and cuts the total number of customers served by approximately 50 percent.

Upcoming dates:

February 15 – trustee presents reorganization plan and disclosure documentation to the court

March 6 – pretrial scheduling conference to set the process and timeline for the BEC court action to void its Southern contract.

March 26 – first court hearing on trustee's plan

SME Report January 2013

Because the January SME meeting will be held on January 30 there is no meeting action to report. The issues in front of the SME Board revolve primarily around the value of and encumbrances on property belonging to SME. Research has revealed that many properties belonging to Southern have liens naming SME. The board committee looking into the property is developing a report.

The comingling of Southern, SME, and IESS finances has caused confusion which may require a strategy for keeping SME open longer than BEC anticipated when the co-op sought convening of the board with the objective of cleanly closing down a venture (SME) that no longer has a purpose and possibly finding assets to distribute to the four co-op members for return to their cooperatives. IESS president Keith Bales has announced that IESS intends to close business. SME has not pursued IESS for payment of the \$50,000 seed money given to IESS.