City of Ellensburg Light Department History

1886 First meeting of Ellensburg City Council

1855 October - After a week long voyage from New York, Sidney Z. Mitchell and F.H. Sparling (students of Thomas Edison) arrived in Seattle and checked into the Occidental Hotel under a gas lamp, which they mean to change in a big way. By the end of their second day in Seattle they had rented office space and set up shop as the regional agents for the Edison Electric Light Company. They developed electric utility systems in the Northwest, including what would later become Puget Sound Power and Light. They both were busy marketing central station electricity systems in the populous centers of western Washington. They eventually branched out to other areas where the need for lighting was greatest including the coal mining of Kittitas County and the City of Ellensburg.

1885-6 Exact date unknown—Sidney Z. Mitchell builds coal fired central electricity steam powered generation plant at 4th and Kittitas Street.

1886-7 John Shoudy purchases an electric lighting system and the power plant from Sidney Mitchell. The Shoudy Ditch brings water from the Yakima River via what was Cascade Way now University Way across town to the site for Shoudy's grain mill near the power plant. A small hydroelectric generator was added to the steam plant.

1887 City Council authorizes Shoudy to build and maintain an electric street light system (Ordinance 41)

1890 City Council adopted Ordinance 141 calling for voters to approve incurring debt to purchase the electric light plant from Shoudy

1891 Ordinance 159 authorized issuing bonds for $44,000 to purchase and equip the 2,300 volt light plant.

1903 Payments were authorized to acquire rights of ways for the power ditch and hydroelectric generation site west of the Yakima River.

1904 Special election with 95% approval authorized a $22,000 bond issue to build a new hydroelectric plant. This included penstocks, waterwheels, machinery and fixtures therein to generate electricity and deliver it 3 miles into town and 5 miles to the City Well on Highway 10.

1911-5 Further improvements costing $170,000 were made to the hydroelectric plant. A 350kW generator was added to the 2-200kW generators, one of which was not in use. This and the Shoudy steam plant at 4th Ave and Kittitas St operated in the winter provided all the electricity Ellensburg needed until 1925.

1926 The City's need for electricity had outgrown its capacity to generate it. In 1926 Puget Sound Power and Light purchased some of the rural customers and about 60 miles of distribution line connected to the City's system to relieve some load. Later that year the City contracted with Puget Power to purchase some additional electricity and granted them a franchise to operate within the City limits.

1936 Council authorizes the Light Dept. to continue the drilling of an oil and gas well in the mouth of Joe Watt canyon that is partially sunk by Taenum Gas & Oil Company. This was an effort to obtain a low cost fuel for operating the steam plant and also control the marketing of natural gas in the Kittitas valley. The well is at 700' and planned for 1200'. E.U. Combs electronologist, has a short wave radio device that locates oil, water and minerals. The City has found his knowledge on water "uncanny" .....and expressed "the test hole expense of $11,000 as good business".

1938 The City purchased the Ellensburg National Bank building at 5th and Pearl with City Light funds to house City Hall.

1941 City starts purchasing electricity from Bonneville Power Administration to supplement its own generation capacity. Customers experience a 25% rate decrease as a result.

1951 One of the City's largest turbines at the hydroelectric plant malfunctioned. Parts for the turbine were not available so it was decided to shut it down due to aging equipment and high operating costs. BPA began supplying all the City's power needs.

1954 City makes the historic decision to bring natural gas to the City of Ellensburg. Vote to the people who approved the $650,000 debt to build the distribution system in Ordinance 2253.

1955 City formed a committee to investigate participation in the Priest Rapids Dam project. A letter from the General Manager of Grant County PUD denied Ellensburg participation in the Priest Rapids Dam project.

1955-1961 City converts its distribution system from 2,300 volts to 12,470 volts, increasing the capacity by 70%.

1956 Light Superintendent Don Thompson recommends dropping the $137,000 proposal to build East Ellensburg Substation and have a second point of delivery from BPA. Higher power costs and pending increase to 12,470 volt system should handle the 600 homes projected to be built by 1967. City manager concurred and it was dropped in favor of building the 7th Ave feeder line.

1957 The hydroelectric plant is sold and the Packwood Canal Company is paid $35,000 to assume ownership of the power ditch.

1955-61 In 1961 the City's annual kilo watt hour sales were 57,000,000.

1966 A limited substation was built at Whitney Park in 1966 at a cost of $137,515 to serve the hospital, the new high school and surrounding neighborhoods. The substation was fed from a 34.5kV express line of Kittitas PUD on Mt View Ave.

1971 Planning for a new East Ellensburg substation started. The Whitney park substation was dismantled and Ellensburg relied on the Dolarway substation to supply its electrical needs. A 10/27/1972 Daily Record article talks about BPA building the new 115kV line around the north end of Ellensburg ending somewhere near the cemetery east of town.

1972 A prolonged outage in the northeast portion of town caused by growth and a failed cable made improvements necessary for reliability. Improvements over a 10 year period included new feeders, underground cables, padmount switches and looping the system. BPA's new substation planned just east of the radio station will also add reliability to the north end of town.

1976 BPA issues a "notice of insufficiency" to all public utilities. This triggers plans to build multiple nuclear plants that will supply future power supply needs in the northwest. There are extensive articles in the Daily Record about conserving power and how the Northwest is short of power supply.

1976-81 City enters into net billing agreement with BPA for Washington Water Power Supply System (WWPSS) nuclear projects 1, 2 and 3. Then along with 88 other public utilities signs on for a percentage of project 4 and 5. Soon it became the most controversial issue of the decade as most of the projects failed and went into default.

1979 BPA completes their East Ellensburg Substation. It is fed from a 115 KV BPA radial transmission line connected to the Coulee-Ellensburg 115 KV northwest of town. This added reliability for the now 5,382 customers.

1981 "Irate –Ratepayer" movement. Several businesses and homes were disconnected for refusing to pay $0.01 per kWh WWPSS settlement surcharge on power bills.

1982 WWPSS projects 4 and 5 are terminated and project 1 is mothballed. A one cent per kWh surcharge is imposed on City ratepayers to pay our share of the default costs. Ellensburg's share of the $2.25 billion debt is $40 million.

1983 State Supreme Court rules that public utilities did not have authority to enter into the agreements and did not have to pay their share of the WWPSS project 4 and 5 debt. Construction on project 3 is halted by BPA who was the debtor. City removes surcharge imposed on customer's bills. The lawsuits start to settle who was getting paid and how much on the largest municipal bond failure in history.

1985 City starts program to sample all transformers for presence of PCB's and then work to eliminate all PCB's from the electrical system.

1987 Merged the Light and Gas departments to form a single Department of Energy Services.

1988 The City's .00625 percent share of WWPSS project 4 and 5 court settlement costs $2,352,547 with about half paid by the City's insurance.

1989 Project Rebound was started focusing on economic development through energy efficiency in the commercial/industrial sector. This was in addition to ongoing residential conservation measures to improve weatherization to 95% of Ellensburg's all-electric homes.

1996 The City's 1996 BPA contract allowed it to purchase a portion of power on the open market. Contracts were executed with Chelan County PUD and Avista Energy. The last year of that agreement was 2000 in which Chelan delivered 1.6 aMW of power at $0.0168/kWh, BPA cost of power was $0.0224/kWh. Total energy purchased in 2000 was 185,350,000 kWh.

1997 Bonneville Power was restructuring its rates and was proposing to charge Ellensburg for transformer service. Purchasing the transformers was more economical than paying BPA forever for the service. The first purchase was the entire East Ellensburg Substation, which was completed July 9, 1997 for $520,000. In August of 1998 the City purchased the two transformers and other related equipment inside the BPA Dolarway Substation for $365,000 leasing the ground under the transformers for $12,500/year.

2000 The West Coast electricity crisis, which began in late 2000 and continued through much of 2001, caught government, utilities, businesses, and consumers by surprise. Many factors contributed to this crisis including poorly designed electricity market restructuring in California, over reliance by some utilities on the wholesale market, market manipulation by some suppliers and traders (Enron), high natural gas prices, the drought in the Northwest, and failure by utilities to add enough new generation capacity during the 1990's. These factors combined to limit available electricity supplies and dramatically increased the wholesale price of electricity on the west coast.

The City signed a new 10 year full requirements power sales contract with BPA in 2000. Due to the substantial increase in wholesale power rates it was decided to issue rate mitigation bonds and use the fund to reduce the impact to retail rates. As wholesale power rates come back down rates would lag and repay the money used. In reality lower rates returned faster than expected and the fund was not used. Extensive conservation efforts were contracted in an effort to purchase less of this high priced power.

2005 A residential building boom hits town. Bonds are issued to finance system expansion and purchase a new main transformer for the City's Dolarway Substation.

2006 Council takes the approach that growth needs to pay for growth after expending nearly 5 million dollars expanding the distribution system in just a few years. Cost for system expansion is shifted to developers to create new plats as well as individual service lines to lots. A 110kW Community Solar system was built with 92 participants.

2007 BPA announces its intention to move to a Tiered Rate Methodology and 20 year contracts. This will establish an allocation of the Federal Based Power System for each of BPA's customers. Any new load above that allocation would be Tier 2 priced at a higher cost or if the utility choses it can find its own resource. The new contract is complex and requires utilities to make decision years in advance. Ground is secured from Central Washington University for a future substation just north of Helena Avenue.

2008 The housing boom ends and the national economy falls into recession. Energy consumption falls across most sectors nationwide. An easement for a third substation site near the corner of Airport Road and Helena Avenue is completed with Central Washington University. A new distribution transformer is installed inside the City substation with a second transformer location readied during that construction. The goal is to get completely out of BPA's Dolarway yard. This retires the 1945 transformer the City purchased from BPA in 1998 when BPA increased the transformation charge. The second 1959 transformer purchased at time is still serving load from a $12,500/year ground lease.

2010 BPA's Tiered Rate Methodology finalizes the contract high water mark which establishes each utilities piece of the Federal Columbia River Power System. Consumption from 2007-2008 was used to establish the allocation of the Federal Power System each utility will have.

2011 The new Tiered Rate Methodology way of purchasing power from BPA takes effect. Utilities across the Northwest struggle with how to recover costs in their rates.

2012 With renewed growth on the north end of the system, plans for a building a third substation are restarted. This will have a second connection to the 115 KV East Ellensburg transmission line and add reliability to the system.

2014 Work begins on the new Helena Avenue substation. This will serve the area of the City's distribution that has the highest growth rate and provide redundancy for the distribution system. Community Solar has been an administrative burden beyond its value so participants are offered buy back options to reimburse their contribution. A voluntary renewable energy rate will replace community solar as a way to market output of the solar system. City Council authorizes an expansion of the Renewable Energy Park solar system increasing its size by 194 kW. A Telecomm utility is started by the City. This will replace Charter Communications fiber system the City has been using for the past 10 years as part of Charters franchise agreement. Several miles of multi strand fiber are installed and will be operated by the City to provide metropolitan area network services and high speed internet to a limited number of customers initially.

2016 Helena substation is energized. Only two feeders are connected with additional getaway connections built for future additions. After a lengthy study City Council authorized a non-federal power purchase to serve Tier 2 needs 2020 to 2024. Chelan County PUD sold us power at $33/MW as compared to the $51/MW purchased from BPA.

2017 Circuit Switcher purchased in 2009 is installed at East Ellensburg substation. Light Emitting Diodes (LED) are revolutionizing lighting. Extensive conservation work with LED's reduce the City's energy consumption by 3.6 million kWh in a two year period. Annual energy sales are 200,000,000 kWh with a revenue of $14.5 million. BPA proposes to increase the ground lease under the remaining transformer from $12,500/year to $55,000/year. This proposal will accelerate plans to install a new 2nd transformer in the City's Dolarway substation and get completely out of BPA's Dolarway substation.

2018 Bonneville Power rates are above the wholesale market and there is growing interest in exploring options outside the full requirement arrangement the City of Ellensburg has with BPA. BPA is very aware of their high rates and the possibilities utilities will seek other suppliers of wholesale power at the upcoming 2028 contract expirations. Energy Northwest, which is fully funded by BPA, completed a legal analysis of the 1973 Net Billing agreement terms. That analysis concluded the participants are obligated to repay their allocation of the debt. Utilities' transactions with BPA are applied to the utilities' debt obligation however, if a utility ceases to purchase either power or transmission services from BPA in an amount equal to or greater than the annual debt obligation that debt obligation must be paid directly to Energy Northwest. 45 years after signing up for a 0.02169% share of WNP-1 thru WNP-3 nuclear power generation plants Ellensburg's debt obligation is still $35,570,303

City of Ellensburg Electric Rate History

The first meter was installed at Barge Hall on Central Washington Normal School December 18, 1895. The school was charged $0.20 per kWh. Their total bill from December 18, 1895 to March 31st, 1896 was $33.60.

Electricity was first only used for lighting. Council minutes from 1905 show that effective January 1906 residences were charged a flat rate of $2 for the first 4-16 candlepower lamps, any more than 4 lights were charged $0.30 each. The metered rate was sold in blocks at that time. $0.10 per kWh for up to 50 kWhs, dropping $0.005 for each additional 50 kWh block down to $.075 for 300 kWh. It is doubtful a residence in that era could use more than 300 kWh.

In 1916 residential rates started at $0.10 per kWh for 50 kWhs, dropping to $0.002 for all above 1000 kWh. The cost of 1000 kWh in 1916 was $57.

In 1918 the cost for 1000 kWh had increased to $67 with the rate of $0.03 for all kWh above 1000 kWh.

By 1927 the first 60 kWh were at $0.09 declining to $0.035 for all above 60 kWh. 1000 kWh was costing $38.30

In 1932 Council lowered the rate to $31.20 for 1000 kWh and by 1937 the cost of 1000 kWh had dropped substantially to only $14.60 due to purchasing a portion of it supply with lower cost power from Puget Sound Power and Light.

In August on 1941 the City began purchasing a portion of its electricity from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). A stepped rate design started at $0.03 for the first 50 kWh declining to $0.0075 for everything over 300 kWh. The cost of 1000 kWh was $9.75.

In 1944 there was a flat rate for electric water heaters of $3 per 1000 watts of heating element capacity. Many people shut their water heaters off in the winter and used the "waterjacket" on their woodstoves. This lasted until 1948.

In 1953 the City was purchasing all its electricity from BPA. Residential rates were $0.03 for the first 50 kWh declining to $0.0075 for everything over 300 kWh. The City received awards from the Northwest Public Power Association for having average residential rates less than $0.01 per kWh for a number of years.

1963 City Council lowered rates to $0.02 for the first 200 kWh, $0.01 for the next 200 kWh and $0.0075 for all above 300 kWh. The cost of 1000 kWh was $9.75. At this time many homes were heated with electricity.

1978 residential rates were $0.012 per kWh in the summer months and $0.0138 per kWh in the winter months. Electric consumption grew during this period. It was cheap and available.

1976 BPA issues a warning to its public utility customers if consumption continued at its current rate by 1983 there would not be enough electricity to meet their needs.

1980 residential rates are $0.0179 per kWh in the summer months and $0.0206 per kWh in the winter months. The cost of 1000 kWh was $19.50.

1982 a $0.01 per kWh surcharge is imposed on all rates while the Courts decided the outcome of the WWPSS nuclear project defaults. The "Irate Ratepayers" was formed and packet Council meetings voicing their concerns. The surcharge was used to pay City attorney fees and the amount of the final settlement. A balance of $1,091,887 was returned to the ratepayers.

2014 in an effort to continue replicating BPA's tiered rates to our customers an inclining block rate design was implemented. The more the utility purchases from BPA the more it costs so that is reflected in the inclining block rates effective January 1, 2015.

This chart shows Residential rate history since May of 1982

Effective Date	Per kwh	Monthly Service Charge
5/1/1982	$0.0248	$6.00
10/1/1982	$0.0343	$8.33
11/1/1983	$0.0396	$9.60
9/1/1984	$0.0367	$4.00
10/11/1987	$0.0394	$4.00
10/1/1991	$0.0402	$4.07
10/1/1993	$0.0446	$4.52
1/1/1997	$0.0428	$4.52
8/1/2001	$0.0470	$4.97
9/1/2002	$0.0525	$8.00
8/1/2003	$0.0539	$10.00
1/1/2006	$0.0593	$11.00
1/1/2010	$0.0593	$11.00
12/1/2011	$0.0593	$14.26
12/1/2012	$0.0610	$15.58
1/1/2015	<600kwh = $.0626 >600kWh = $.0680	$17.26
1/1/2017	<600kwh = $.0626 >600kWh = $.0680	$21.11
3/10/2018	$.0677	$22.51
4/1/2019	$.0737	$28.00
1/1/2020	$.0737	$28.00

Superintendents/Directors	Date Served
D. Thiery	1892- ?
W.S.Trullinger	? - 1899
W.B. Leverich	1899 - 1907
E.W.Clark	1907 – 1908
W.B. Leverich	1908 – 1909
E.L. Butler	1909 – 1920
George S. Palmer	1920 – 1921
Willis Hall	1921 – 1943
Charlie E. Culp	1943 – 1946
Lewis K. Ambrose	1946 – 1950
Edward N. Allenbaugh	1951 – 1955
Jack Kennedy	1955 – 4 months

Don Thompson	1955 – 1958
John P. Robertson	1958 – 1966
Earl Knight	1966 – 1971
Gerald Zeitler	1972 – 1976
Thomas J. Chini	1976 – 1984
Douglas D. Williams	1984 – 1987
Paul V. Rogers	1987 – 1994
Richard Wickwire	1994 – 1999
Robert J. Titus	1999 – 2012
Larry Dunbar	2012 - 2018
Ryan Lyyski	2018 -