

October 17, 2019

The City Council of the City of Idaho Falls met in Special Council Meeting, Thursday, October 17, 2019, at Sunnyside Elementary School located at 165 Cobblestone Lane in Idaho Falls, Idaho at 6:30 p.m.

**Call to Order:**

There were present:

- Mayor Rebecca L. Noah Casper
- Councilmember Thomas Hally
- Councilmember John Radford
- Councilmember Jim Francis
- Councilmember Michelle Ziel-Dingman
- Councilmember Shelly Smede
- Councilmember Jim Freeman

Also Present:

- Bear Prairie, Idaho Falls Power General Manager (GM)
- Randy Fife, City Attorney
- Linda Lundquist, Idaho Falls Power Executive Assistant

**Pledge of Allegiance:**

Mayor Casper led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Fiber Pilot Project Review and Report:**

GM Prairie wished a happy birthday to Councilmember Freeman and then gave a short briefing of how the year went for the Fiber Pilot Project. He asked for a raise of hands of those that owned a Power Company and told the crowd, "You all own a power company that has low rates." He then asked who in the room owns a fiber network? He explained how they all own a fiber network if they live in Idaho Falls. He explained that the City can utilize the existing utility infrastructure to allow for a buildout of fiber. "We can do things at an affordable price to help bring down costs. We built during the pilot, two miles of overhead fiber, 10 miles in existing conduit, 12 miles in new conduit that installed, and over 13 miles of new electrical conduit installed," GM Prairie stated. He thanked the community for their patience on some of the backyard digging and added that the pilot would not have been successful without the hard work of the staff and contractors in town. He continued that fiber now passes by 1250 residences with 305 being connected and noted that that number grows at a rate of four to six new fiber customers per day, with staff working overtime and weekends to get ahead of the ground-freezing weather. GM Prairie said the pilot has been exceeding expectations and that we wouldn't be where we are without UTOPIA Fiber, a not-for-profit key business partner who provides the open access software and runs open access networks predominantly in Utah. The utility set out a year ago to see how to buildout a highly reliable network that would be affordable and desired by the community. By leveraging the existing dark fiber network, coupled with existing power infrastructure, the utility proved that the fiber to the home could be co-located economically with power utility infrastructure. When looking at the numbers and subscription rates, the fiber investment is projected to be, 100 percent paid for in 11 years based on what he feels are conservative customer take rates. If the utility can drive down the price, the community will share in the benefit. GM Prairie continued, "I propose to lower the fiber cost from \$30 to \$25 per month, effective Jan. 1, 2020." He shared his excitement about 250 megawatts of speed, uploading and downloading and stated that the biggest thing for Council to consider is that the buildout can be paid off in 11 years with conservative take rates and that if the take rates increase, the payback will be sooner, comparing a normal infrastructure buildout, like traditional electric, water or sewer, that normally takes 30-40 years to be paid back. Mayor asked for clarification on how Council can ask questions and GM Prairie said during the deliberation. He then invited Joelyn Hansen, Customer Relations Supervisor to read a comment from a new fiber customer who wasn't able to attend.

**Fiber Customer Comments and Feedback:**

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Jamie Braithwaite's comments read by Joelyn Hansen, "My name is Jamie Braithwaite. My husband Garth and I live in the Stonebrook Community. We have seven children; two attending Taylorview Middle School, three attending Sunnyside Elementary, a preschooler and one more at home. I became the President of Stonebrook Home Owners Association in 2016. One of our main conversations was helping find a faster internet solution for our community. We moved to Idaho Falls in 2014. My husband works remotely from his office in our home for Adobe as a software engineer. He travels to San Francisco once a quarter to the main office. A large portion of his day is spent in video conferences. Download speeds and upload speeds are a very important part of his job. With cable speeds, we were lucky if we got 90 megawatts download on a good day and 10 megawatts upload speed. Now our direct line fiber speed is more that 900% faster with 914 megawatts download and 925 upload speeds. On the wireless network, we get 534 down and 431 upload speeds. Now our household can stream on multiple devices, smart TVs, and never interrupt Garth's video conferencing. It is amazing!!! Thank you, City of Idaho Falls Power and Fiber, for your work to help our community attract others in the technology fields like my husband and our family."

Michael Malone, the President-elect for the Stonebrook Home Owner's Association began that he wasn't as instrumental in bringing fiber to the neighborhood, but was excited about the prospect. He noted some of the resident's concerns as their yards were getting torn up, but said he also noticed that workers were at residences for up to six hours and the did a great job putting yards back together. He had some constructive feedback for Silver Star, which was for them to learn more about the modems and process, because they weren't able to answer his questions as to whether they were bringing a modem to the install and if it was wireless or not. When Idaho Falls Fiber came onsite, they brought the modem and just plugged it in to the existing system and while it was off in the beginning, they were able to get it up and running right away.

Audie Trudell, lives in Waterford and is the President of the Home Owner's Association. He said he had an A+ experience with Silver Star. They wired through his garage and didn't need any work in the yard. He stated that communication was very good between him, Silver Star and the City. He added that the price point for families that were paying maybe \$2 more, were also getting speeds upward of 938 on speed tests, running all kinds of devices and streaming everything. Mr. Trudell said he was very happy that fiber is here. Mayor Casper commented that Mr. Trudell was in phase 2 of the pilot.

Mayor Casper invited others to share their thoughts.

Joe Stanishley noticed the plans for the buildout next year and is still outside of the area and was wondering why the buildout is taking so long. He noted that 5G will be coming next year and will be a competitor, and suggested that maybe it would be better for someone like Verizon to handle the buildout.

Brandon Fire of Ridgewood Park now has fiber and stated that the crews are awesome but the only trouble was switching from rj45 cable. He said the service provider didn't provide him help on the switch over, but he eventually figured it out. Brandon stated that he loves fiber and the good service.

### **Council Discussion:**

Mayor Casper led with two questions. One, are we still installing like crazy? Two, how much longer will we be working? GM Prairie answered that we are going to try and get everyone connected within 3 weeks of signing up. He went on to say that installs in the winter after the ground has froze we will likely be laying fiber along the fence line and will return in the Spring to bury the cable for customer connections to the pilot area network. This practice follows most construction operations and in the event the line is damaged, we will repair at no charge to the customer if we have to place it in a temporary location due to weather. The future is smart thermostats and appliances where customers can opt into programs where they react to the utility needs and can automatically turn them off energy consuming items for a period at high peak loads to save on energy costs. Fiber allows for a connection into homes to allow customers to interact with the utility and their energy usage.

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Councilmember Hally mentioned that 5G had been brought up earlier with maybe a hint it will surpass fiber? GM Prairie said that question is asked often. He continued that if we could deliver electricity without wires, then we would. In order for 5G to work, it requires microcell sites that have to have four to eight fibers for each carrier for each cell site. 5G is line-of-site and short wave and doesn't penetrate through buildings, trees, etc. very effectively from his understanding. 5G will require a huge amount of infrastructure and fiber will be there to service that also, especially with the future of things like 3D shopping and other high data bandwidth requirements, which would completely tax a 5G network.

Councilmember Dingman asked if we are meeting best practice standards for installation times. GM Prairie stated that everything is a ramp up process. The pilot phase was a large amount of work over a short amount of time. One year's worth of work was completed in about three months and all the customers became eligible for service all at once. In the future, the rollout will be 30-40 homes at a time with a continuous rollout schedule.

Councilmember Francis pointed out that the fiber connectivity would have potentially 28,000 users and that is why fiber makes sense.

Mayor Casper asked why the process takes so long and when did it begin. GM Prairie said the planning started about one year ago in Tautphaus Park but boring in Stonebrook only began in late May 2019. He continued, that he thinks the buildout will be about a four-year process that could run into five years, which is a pretty big chunk over five years.

Councilmember Freeman stated that he was curious as to how the utility determines which neighborhood to buildout next? GM Prairie answered that it's easy to jump on constructing overhead, like North of Tautphaus Park. We've spent 118 years putting stuff on poles, like mostly east of downtown and added that the West side of town has some failing direct buried power lines and that it makes sense to repair out there and run the fiber at the same time. Mayor Casper asked if there were further questions or thoughts from Councilmembers?

Councilmember Radford stated that we as elected officials look forward to and think about our children and their futures. If we look forward, we see a community that is driven by interconnectivity from driverless cars to virtual travel where we will be able to see the Great Wall of China, right in our own homes. We will have the use of 3D holograms to visit our grandchildren. He continued that a virtual store such as a bookstore, that you'd be able to flip through the pages of books, as if there on site. These types of societal changes are happening now and we need to build the infrastructure to make this possible. 5G needs fiber. It is in the best interest of the City to move forward.

Mayor Casper asked if there was a motion.

It was moved by Councilmember Radford, seconded by Councilmember Hally, for the City utility to buildout fiber with budgeted funds, and give authorization for the Mayor to execute the necessary documents. Roll call as follows: Aye – Councilmembers Francis, Dingman, Smede, Freeman, Hally, Radford. Nay – none. Motion carried.

Mayor Casper stated that fiber will allow for more successful home businesses and hopefully in five years, there will be no more buffering. She congratulated Council, the utility and fiber owners. She said she was excited and proud. GM Prairie followed, stressing the fact that it is a community's network and success hinges on how fast and how much support will be gained from the community.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

s/ Linda Lundquist  
Linda Lundquist, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

s/ Rebecca L. Noah Casper  
Rebecca L. Noah Casper, MAYOR