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NEWS

Firelands Electric Cooperative plans new \$6 million Ashland County substation

by Hayden Gray

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Don Englet, general manager of Firelands Electric Cooperative, speaks to the Ashland County Board of Commissioners on Thursday. Credit: Hayden Gray

ASHLAND — Firelands Electric Cooperative plans a \$6 million investment to increase reliability in Ashland County.

Firelands Electric is a non-profit electric distribution co-op founded in 1936. Based in New London, it serves rural portions of Ashland, Huron, Lorain, Richland and Seneca counties.

The non-profit is governed by a nine-member board of trustees, which includes co-op members elected by fellow members.

Firelands Electric owns and operates three substations in Ashland County:

- **Ashland substation, located off Baney Road.**
- **Jeromesville substation, located off Ohio 89.**
- **Coulter substation, located off County Road 1075 just south of Ohio 39.**

It's now planning to add a fourth, which will be called the Hillsdale substation.

Don Englet, general manager of [Firelands Electric Cooperative](#), provided program updates last week to the Ashland County Board of Commissioners.

Englet said Firelands Electric owns and operates about 997 miles of distribution lines throughout the five counties it covers and serves 9,316 members.

About 400 miles of distribution lines run throughout Ashland County, serving about 3,100 members, Englet said. Four of the current nine trustees are county residents.

"Ashland is pretty well represented amongst that group," he said.

The general manager said Firelands Electric is in the process of purchasing property in Ashland County to construct a new substation at the intersection of County Road 1754 and Township Road 605.

He said that particular property serves Firelands Electric's purpose "very well" because FirstEnergy has a 138,000-volt transmission line which crosses the property and Firelands Electric has a distribution line there that ties between the Ashland and Jeromesville substations.

Englet said Firelands Electric rents space on investor-owned transmission lines and takes that power to its substations. While the company owns all the distribution, Englet said substation locations are dependent on proximity to those transmission lines.

The Ashland substation serves about 1,500 co-op members and uses about 60 percent of its capacity. The Jeromesville substation only serves 764 members, but uses 86 percent of its capacity.

Coulter substation is currently under construction to triple its size, Englet said.

Lengthy lead times may slow project

Before Firelands Electric finalizes engineering for the Hillsdale substation, Englet said he wanted to open communication with commissioners and ask if there are any known projects coming that may require a large energy load in the southern portion of the county.

"We're estimating that substation project at just under \$6 million," he told commissioners. "Before we make that \$6 million investment and get down the road a couple years and the loads not big enough, we just wanted to take the opportunity to touch base."

Commissioner Michael Welch said county residents in the area of the future Hillsdale substation may contact Englet if they know of any future projects.

Firelands Electric can be contacted by phone at (419)-929-1571.

Should the project move forward as planned, Englet said Firelands Electric would need to sign an agreement with FirstEnergy. He said FirstEnergy estimated its portion of the project could take up to 26 months to complete.

However, the bigger challenge to the project is projected lead times for a power transformer.

“The last two that we’ve ordered, we’ve seen lead times on those that are over three years,” Englet said. “Our engineer has warned us that we may see a lead time on that transformer up to five years to get that one in.”

Once operational, he said the Hillsdale substation should operate at about 30 percent of its capacity. It will also be used to backfeed other substations when they’re offline, he said.

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