

Update on NOVEC unreliability problem

A Town Hall meeting was held on May 18 at Fairview Elementary School at 7:00 p.m. Prior to the meeting, letters were sent by the Special Committee on Utilities to all 539 homeowners in our subdivision. Also, reminder cards were sent to all homeowners 3 days prior to the event by the office of Delegate Tim Hugo. This meeting was also posted on the HOA website and signs were posted at various points on the road within our subdivision.

The meeting was attended by 7 of the 9 members of the Board of Directors of NOVEC.

Also in attendance was the majority of the executive staff of NOVEC, including President and CEO Stan Feuerberg. Several engineers from NOVEC were also present.

Delegate Tim Hugo from the Virginia House of Delegates led the Town Hall meeting. At the head table were Fairfax County Supervisor Pat Herry and State Senator Dave Marsden of the 37th Senatorial District of Virginia.

The meeting began with a history of the electric grid in Fairfax Station, and a powerpoint presentation by the Special Committee on Utilities was presented. To see the entire presentation, go to our website at www.fshoa-va.com. It is self-explanatory and outlines the problem with our electric service, the procedure the committee followed to find solutions, and the recommendations we made to NOVEC, Delegate Hugo, and Supervisor Herry at the Town Hall meeting.

NOVEC then presented their powerpoint presentation, and outlined many changes they have made in the last 3 months as a result of the efforts of our committee, Delegate Hugo and Supervisor Herry. NOVEC has made several significant improvements to provide more reliable service since February. They finally admitted that our subdivision fell through the cracks and that they were not aware of the problems in our subdivision until our committee enlisted Delegate Hugo and Supervisor Herry to help plead our cause.

At this time, NOVEC improvements include:

- 1) More aggressive tree trimming along the power lines, with the option of going outside the legal easement if there is a dead tree that might fall on the lines. These trees will be removed. The vast majority of outages are caused by trees and tree limbs.
- 2) Installing 103 “sectionalizing devices” (fuses, switches, and reclosers) to enable field technicians and control center operators to locate problems quickly. This will reduce the number of customers affected by outages and reduce the duration of outages. “Fault indicators” have also been installed throughout the area. They assist NOVEC technicians in diagnosing problems more quickly.
- 3) Installing “Spacer Cable” on a portion of the line feeding Popes Head substation and on a section of line located between Yates Ford Rd. and Chapel Rd. This cable will

“harden” overhead lines where trees are problematic. Spacer cable has been reported to reduce tree-caused customer interruptions by 90% compared to the bare open-wire construction that is the norm.

4) Rebuilding 35 miles of overhead distribution line. Pole diameters will be increased and span distances between poles decreased to provide additional resiliency.

5) Installing remotely controllable switches to permit Fairfax Station customers to be fed from EITHER the Popes Head or the Moore substations, rather than just one or the other. A remote transfer of power from one station to the other can be accomplished in a matter of minutes and does not require that technicians be sent to the field. These switches are expected to be operational by June 1. Thus, if one station goes down and cannot provide power, the other station will kick in almost immediately so that electricity outages will not occur.

6) Installation of special meters in various homes in Fairfax Station to monitor electric performance and reliability. These reports will be forwarded to the HOA for the next 12 months and will be shared on the HOA website in the future.

7) Implementation of Interactive Voice Response (IVR) phone lines at NOVEC that can now take as many as 50,000 calls during a major storm event. This new computer voice response is now being used so that customers can call into the emergency center when there is an outage. There have been problems with the computer system in the past but those problems have been overcome, and the system should respond with more accuracy about restoration times.

According to NOVEC officials, the improvements listed above will improve reliability significantly, but they cannot guarantee that we will reach the industry standard, or that our NOVEC part of the neighborhood will equal the reliability of the Dominion Virginia Power (DVP) part of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, they insisted that the money spent on these improvements will prevent the majority of our spikes, brownouts and outages.

Our committee then made recommendations based upon our own fact-finding research, the reports of arborists regarding the situation with diseased, stressed and dying trees, and the report of the President of Benfield Electric Company, Paul Dressler, who stated that he does not think that the solutions NOVEC is presenting will work in the long term.

Our committee recommendations are presented in the powerpoint presentation posted on the HOA website. The most significant recommendation from our committee is that “Plan B” be implemented immediately as a backup to the NOVEC solution, which we call Plan A.

“Plan B” is to immediately commence a feasibility study to explore the possibility that the NOVEC side of the subdivision be allowed to use power purchased by NOVEC from DVP. This plan would involve the building of a small, fenced substation with an intermediate step-down substation transformer and circuit breakers in Fairfax Station.

The two systems (NOVEC and DVP) would then be connected so that the NOVEC customers would be connected to the DVP grid that serves parts of Clara Barton Dr. and Robert Carter Rd.

This is the same grid that also serves the businesses on Burke Centre Parkway, and thus it rarely goes down in a severe weather event. “Plan B” would mean that customers of NOVEC would continue to be served by NOVEC. Their power would be purchased from DVP with connection to the DVP power grid that has been consistently reliable, even in adverse weather conditions.

Several questions were asked by member of the community regarding the various options suggested by NOVEC and our committee. One homeowner asked for priority in power restoration to our neighborhood when the power DOES go out. The response was that NOVEC follows “industry-wide service restoration practices” that dictate that electric service be restored to the greatest number of people in the shortest period of time. Of course, priority is placed on vital community services such as hospitals, 911 calls involving fires, vehicle accidents and fallen power lines. After that, our subdivision will probably continue to be one of the last restored since areas with larger numbers of customers will have service restored first.

Another question was asked about the possibility of burying the power distribution lines underground. That option is not feasible at all, according to NOVEC. The cost would be absolutely prohibitive and underground lines do not necessarily alleviate outages. In fact, it is possible that underground lines may sustain more damage than above-ground wires as time goes on and weather changes cause problems.

The Town Hall meeting ended at approximately 9:30 p.m.

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