

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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Rachel Johnson ([00:17](#)):

Welcome back to Co-op Energy Talk. I'm your host, Rachel Johnson, and you are listening to the board meeting brief podcast for the board meeting from Monday, December 18th. Uh, four quick things I wanted to update you on this month that happened at the board meeting. First we had a special presentation from our cybersecurity czar. That's not really his title, that's just how I think of him. But anyway, uh, the kind of the main person here who's responsible for our planning and response to any particular cybersecurity events. So he updated the board on our cybersecurity incident response plan, what we're doing proactively to prevent the co-op from, um, being targeted by a cybersecurity event and also how we have proactively prepared to recover from a cybersecurity incident. Obviously a really heavy topic, but it is, I think, a really important thing for us to be managing as a cooperative 'cause it is one of the bigger risks we have.

Rachel Johnson ([01:02](#)):

So it was good to update the board on what we've been doing, get their feedback on that, and just make sure that we continue to pay very close attention to that risk and manage it for our members. The second thing that we talked about at the board meeting, our board received a kind of a special presentation on a low income home repair grant program that launched this fall. This shouldn't sound totally unfamiliar to you all because we've been doing a lot in the low income home repair space for the last 10 years, but this is kind of what I think is the kind of final iteration of how we feel we can best manage that as a cooperative. So what we're doing, what we started doing this year, and we'll continue to do next year, is we're using existing money that is budgeted inside our energy waste reduction or energy rebate program, but we're earmarking it for grants that can be applied for by nonprofits who are making repairs in the homes of cherry land members.

Rachel Johnson ([01:49](#)):

There's, uh, quite a bit of detail in there about caps on what the grant can be, but we are not necessarily putting a lot of restrictions on how the grant can be used so that they can just really do whatever that member needs that's gonna make their home safer, more reliable, and more energy efficient. We've already had two successful projects in that grant program this fall. Looking forward to continuing it next year. The, the main nonprofits that we're working with right now are Habitat for Humanity here in Grand Traverse County, the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency and Freedom Builders. But any local nonprofit that is working in the home repair space is welcome to reach out to us if they're interested in learning more. Uh, and again, the kind of the, the grant making process is in a grant directly to the member. It's through that nonprofit to help the member.

Rachel Johnson ([02:32](#)):

The third thing we talked about, uh, was a, a change to our line extension policies. And I've been talking about line extension policies for a while here, but this is just basically the amount, the fees that are charged to a member to get power extended to a new location that doesn't currently have power. Uh, this new policy, which hasn't existed before, but we've kinda, we've kind of done it in practice and not really had it codified into policy will apply when someone buys a property zoned residential. They're gonna start by building a pole barn or something else and they may eventually build a house on the property or some other type of, um, you know, residential structure on the property, but they're

starting with a pole barn or something like that, maybe a camper. This is the policy that would apply to them. So it's just a little different than our normal residential policy.

Rachel Johnson ([03:15](#)):

I'm not gonna get into the details here 'cause it's so technical and it only applies if you're thinking about doing that. But if you are a builder or someone who's thinking about buying some land soon, but not necessarily building a house right away, I would encourage you to reach out to our member services department so that we can talk you through how that policy works and what it will mean for you in terms of budgeting for your build cost. The fourth thing that the board approved this month was our 2024 operating expense budget. I've already talked about this kind of ad nauseum over the last several months, uh, but one of the nice things was since November we were actually able to move some things around. We're able to increase our projected margins to be a little bit more, uh, a, we were a little bit more comfortable with them.

Rachel Johnson ([03:53](#)):

Uh, we still, we still definitely are kind of on track for some sort of a rate increase, probably mid 2024. I'll continue to keep you updated on what that's gonna look like for our members, but I think it's gonna kind of continue to stay in pretty much in line with what we saw for, um, utility inflation over the last year. So, uh, stay tuned for that. But we did get approval on that budget, so we're ready to go with continuing to vest in the system over the next several months. The board has approved us to do that and you know, I'll just continue to remind everybody those investments pay off. We just had a kind of a little squally storm move through the area yesterday and had almost no outages on our system and the very few small outages we had, we were able to get restored really, really quickly. And that is the reliability value of the investments we make. So very grateful to the board for continuing to allow us to do that. Our next board meeting is Monday, January 22nd. We will as always start with member input at 9:00 AM So feel free to swing by if you have any feedback for the board. Join us next time for more co-op Energy talk.