

From: Jenna Kay
To: City 2025 Como Plan; Jeffrey Delapena
Subject: FW: [wacaucus] Seattle's climate and housing efforts bottlenecked by ... power poles?
Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2026 2:40:52 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)
[image.png](#)

For the record

From: Don Steinke <crvancouverusa@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 3, 2026 1:35 PM
To: Small, Rebecca <Rebecca.Small@cityofvancouver.us>; Jenna Kay <Jenna.Kay@clark.wa.gov>; Margaret M. Anderson <mmanderson@clarkpud.com>
Subject: Fwd: [wacaucus] Seattle's climate and housing efforts bottlenecked by ... power poles?

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I believe this is relevant to your work.
Don Steinke
fyi

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Rob Harmon <robharmon@convenientopportunities.com>
Date: Tue, Mar 3, 2026 at 6:41 AM
Subject: [wacaucus] Seattle's climate and housing efforts bottlenecked by ... power poles?
To: WA Caucus <wacaucus@nwec-caucus.org>

This gets more interesting (in my view) towards the end.

As Bonnie Frye Hemphill says, "If you don't already subscribe to The Seattle Times, consider supporting independent journalism today."

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/seattles-climate-and-housing-efforts-bottlenecked-by-power-poles/>

Seattle's climate and housing efforts bottlenecked by ... power poles?

By GREG KIM
Seattle Times staff reporter

It was supposed to be a relatively simple project — a fourplex in the Central District — the kind of "middle housing" Seattle and Washington officials say they desperately need to fix the region's housing crisis.

But it turned into a nightmare for developer Perpetuity LLC, which said the process to get four homes hooked up to the city's power utility lasted more than two years, longer than building the homes themselves, and cost the company more

than \$270,000. The project was ultimately unprofitable in part because of the delays.

The problem, Perpetuity and other developers say, is a ballooning bureaucracy to connect homes to power, an issue that came to a head in February 2025 when Seattle City Light enacted a new policy: New housing with four or more units on a lot was required to plug into the electrical grid underground. Until then, fourplexes could connect overhead through power poles.

Some builders are in an uproar,

saying the process of burying wires can involve uncertain permitting timelines with multiple city departments, requiring months to years of design and engineering, and is preventing some housing from ever being built.

"One builder goes through that once and they're like, 'I'm not doing that again,'" said Lucas DeHerrera, who worked with Perpetuity on the Central District fourplex through development firm Blueprint Capital. The fourplex predated the new policy and had to bury wires underground due to physical requirements, but DeHerrera said it shows

how the process can derail a project.

Some former city officials have also criticized City Light's policies. In a memo to city council members obtained by The Seattle Times through a public records request, Marco Lowe, who served as chief operating officer under then-Mayor Bruce Harrell, wrote that requiring small projects to use underground wires constrained the city's ability to address its housing shortage.

"Many decisions are made primarily from a utility optimization perspective, with insufficient consideration of downstream housing impacts," Lowe wrote.

Seattle City Light says its new rule was driven by policy changes upstate. In recent years, city and state lawmakers have passed landmark legislation to tackle two of the most pressing issues locally and globally — housing affordability and

See > **BOTTLENECK, A10**

CLIMATE LAB

< Bottleneck from 41

climate change — by mandating greater density and accelerating the electrification of homes and vehicles.

These efforts are colliding against an unexpected bottleneck: power poles.

The city's utility says its pole crew physically support the added electrical load, so lines more go underground. But that's not cheap. And experts argue that, under the current system, those costs fall disproportionately on lower-income residents who end up paying more for housing.

The city is considering some creative solutions, but more could level in uplight neighborhoods, or require residents to think differently about when they — and their neighbors — use electricity.

As a result, officials say they are introducing the idea slowly and with caution.

More power, more problems

Seattle City Light's solution is to use wooden poles and heavier lines pulling against them. And every time you dig a storm and a pole could snap and fall into the street, says a city spokesman. "It might be someone's car, or a car, or a house," he says. "It could potentially hurt someone while maintaining the pole, and we don't want to be the public at risk," said Andy Strong, Seattle City Light's environmental, engineering

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KAREN BUCKY / THE SEATTLE TIMES

New multiunit homes could overwhelm existing power poles and power lines, like these on East Pine Street in Seattle. The project was ultimately unprofitable in part because of the delays.

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About the project

Climate Lab is a Seattle Times initiative that explores the effects of climate change in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. The project is funded in part by the Seattle Foundation, O2 Foundation, Jim and Betsy Falconer, Mike and Becky Hughes, Henry M. Jackson Foundation, Martin Faber Foundation, Craig McKelken and Sarah Werner, Mary Seaps and Spencer Frazer, University of Washington and Walker Family Foundation, and its local sponsor is the Seattle Foundation.

Another technology gaining traction is the "smart poles," which combine how much electricity goes needed to different circuits in a home. Smart poles allow multiple units on a single lot — such as a fourplex — to share a thinner service line connecting to underground power lines. If power is not needed, it can exceed the limit of the line.

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