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City Commission Approves Lakeland Electric's New "Smart Grid"

By [John Chambliss](#)

THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | City commissioners approved Lakeland Electric's new \$35 million "smart grid" plan that will address outages more quickly, allow customers to access electricity usage online, and curb stolen electricity.

The smart grid will read all customer electric meters from the utility's offices - and allow customers to go online to read their own usage.

In a power outage, Lakeland Electric would know what has failed before a customer phones in a report, said David Kus, assistant general manager of customer service for Lakeland Electric.

Commissioners voted 4-2 to approve the plan.

Mayor Gow Fields, and City Commissioners Edie Yates, Phillip Walker and Don Selvage, voted yes. Commissioner Glenn Higgins was absent.

City Commissioners Justin Troller and Howard Wiggs voted no because some of Lakeland's largest companies won't be required to pay a higher rate for the plan.

The smart grid comes with a slight rate increase to help pay for the system.

The average increase will be about 14 cents per 1,000 kilowatt-hours - or about 18 cents per month for the average user of 1,300 kwh per month, said Jeff Sprague, manager of pricing and rates.

Troller said residents and small business owners are paying for big business electric customers.

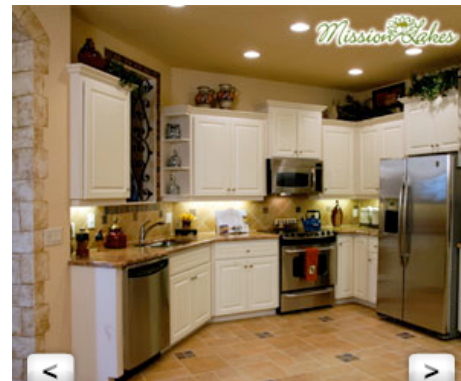
"It's ridiculous," Troller said. "Make it fair for everybody."

Wiggs said power for those big companies, which have interruptible contracts, has never been stopped.

"If they're never interrupted, why should they get preferential treatment?" Wiggs asked.

Those big customers with interruptible contracts are Pepperidge Farm, The Ledger, Keymark Corp., Juice Bowl, Consolidated Container and Carpenter Co.

Sprague said those customers already pay for something similar to smart grid in



their own contracts.

"If there is a customer group who have already shouldered similar costs, it was determined that it would be unfair to burden them with a second cost," Sprague said.

Part of the smart grid will be paid for with a \$13 million federal stimulus grant.

Lakeland Electric was one of 100 utility companies chosen nationally to receive the grant.

In all, 400 utilities applied for the money.

The remaining \$22 million of the \$35 million price tag will come from utility bonds that will be paid back during the next 15 years.

The rate increase will cover the cost of those bonds.

Troller and Fields briefly exchanged words during the discussion.

After Troller said some customers will be treated unfairly, Fields said to Troller, "your point is inaccurate and based on incorrect information."

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