

AltaLink Makes 11th Hour Offer to Cost-Share and Bury a Portion of the Heartland Line near Colchester Elementary School

On January 17th, 2012 parents from Colchester Elementary School met with Heartland Transmission Project applicants AltaLink/EPCOR and Elk Island Public School representatives to discuss additional routing options around the school. Since the AUC decision required the power companies to investigate re-alignment options which minimize the impact on Colchester Elementary School, this commitment fulfills a key part of their obligations under the AUC decision. The initial proposed re-alignment was flat-out rejected by the parents and Elk Island as it did not move the line any further away from the school building. AltaLink VP Darin Watson stated that they would be open to a cost-sharing agreement with the Provincial Government for burial of the portion of the Heartland Transmission Line near Colchester Elementary School.

The Colchester Parents' Association is very keen to work with AltaLink and the Alberta Government on this new proposal. "The school will close if the line is not buried, we said this from the beginning, so burying the line near Colchester Elementary School is a must," said CPA Acting President Gabriel Chemello.

Chemello noted that past experience with AltaLink during the hearings makes it difficult to believe that this is a good-faith offer. "In the past, we've asked for alternate options but they have been associated with outrageous cost-estimates for burying the line that do not take into consideration all of the available technology," Chemello said, "AltaLink has made a few different guesses about what the costs might be; however, as we look at this option, we need to have an independent estimate of the associated costs"

It is worth noting that, during the PC leadership race, Deputy Premier Doug Horner also called for independent costing of the burial option. He said, "We have quotes from \$25 million more to \$500 million more [for building the entire line]. I can't seem to get a straight answer, so I want to go outside the system we have today to companies that have been involved in this kind of thing before and get them to actually give us better information. Then we can make an informed decision."

After Tuesday's meeting Chemello met with MLA Dave Quest. Quest agreed to work with the CPA on this proposal, as the government will be on the hook for paying to relocate all Colchester students in a new or modernized school. He also noted that there must be a call for outside vendor quoting from companies with expertise in this technology as the costs estimated by AltaLink are unacceptable.

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