

Power line creates big buzz

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More than 1,300 residents of west end hear proposal to bury new transmission line

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A growing public campaign to bury proposed power lines attracted more than 1,300 people to an information session Monday night.

The meeting began with a crackling, buzzing noise over the loudspeaker.

"That sound you just heard — that's the sound of electricity," said June McNeil. "That's the sound we could be hearing 24-7."

McNeil is a member of the Coalition of West End Communities for Burying the Line. The group, along with Responsible Electrical Transmission for Albertans, organized the meeting to clear up some of the static they think is being communicated to residents.

The proposed double-circuit 500-kilovolt transmission lines would connect the Heartland region northeast of Fort Saskatchewan to existing transmission facilities west and south of Edmonton. AltaLink and Epcor are co-developing the project, which is considered necessary by the Alberta Electric System Operator.

Four potential routes for the lines are under consideration: west of Edmonton, in the Transportation and Utility Corridor (TUC) on the west side, east of Edmonton, or in the TUC on the east side.

See POWER / A2

Estimates of cost to bury line vary widely

POWER

Continued from A1

Burying the line would cost between four and 20 times the cost of overhead lines, according to AltaLink and Epcor.

However, that was one issue the groups wanted to address. The industry estimates are not based on first-hand experience, since neither AltaLink nor Epcor have been involved in installing this kind of line, said Bruce Johnson of Responsible Electrical Transmission for Albertans.

A European association of cable manufacturers with experience in the matter estimates the cost to be two to four times that of overhead lines, he said.

Johnson said if they estimated it would cost five times as much, that would still add up to only 14 cents extra per household per month.

"Why are we even having this debate?" he asked, to enthusiastic applause.

The associations' main, and most emotional, concerns have to do with the potential impacts of the line on the health and safety of nearby residents.

High-voltage power lines have been conclusively linked to childhood leukemia, Alzheimer's disease, breast cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, birth defects, depression and suicide, said John Kristensen of Responsible Electrical Transmission for Albertans. That information comes from peer-reviewed studies and credible sources, he said.

Shawn Brown and his fiancée Katrina Baldwin were sitting on a leather couch in the

overflow area of the West Edmonton Christian Assembly where the meeting was held. Their 18-month-old daughter, Serenity, sat on Shawn's lap.

"That they would even consider putting it near our homes, where children are growing up, that makes me angry," said Baldwin.

Size was a point raised in the presentation. A double-circuit 240-kV transmission tower is about 38 metres tall. A double-circuit 500-kV tower could be up to 60 metres tall (20 storeys) and its arms would be about twice as wide.

Petitions were passed out for the audience to circulate. They urge the province to ban above-ground double-circuit 500-kV lines within 800 metres of homes, schools, day cares, hospitals and environmentally sensitive areas.

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