

# Power line hearing rules eased

## Utilities commission opens doors for more participants to debate Heartland route

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The Alberta Utilities Commission has announced changes to its intervener process it says will provide people with more opportunity to participate in the upcoming hearing into the proposed Heartland transmission route.

The commission will allow anyone living within 800 metres of either the route or the alternative route to participate without them having to show they are adversely and directly affected.

"In order to provide opportunity for truly meaningful public participation, which we need to make a sound decision in the Heartland, the commission is adapting to the nature and the scope of what we anticipate is coming and adding some additional flexibility to our process," commission spokesman Jim Law said.

"We'll make the presumption that if you are 800 metres from the edge, you have standing unless anyone objects."

Law said the change for this project streamlines the process of determining intervener status, but residents living more than 800 metres off the route can still apply for standing if they believe they are directly

and adversely affected. The board will rule on their individual cases.

The Heartland transmission project is the first of five critical infrastructure projects set out in Bill 50. The bill eliminated the requirement for the province to conduct a hearing into whether the lines are necessary but it still provides for a hearing to determine the exact route the line should take.

Law said the commission encourages people living along the route, and along the alternative route west and north of the city, to pre-register at information sessions in March and April. He said residents attending those meetings will be advised about how to apply for intervener funding if they wish to hire experts and lawyers to support their positions.

"We're taking these steps and allowing very early opportunities to become involved in the process for people who believe they may be affected," Law said. "We're doing it given the nature and the scope of this proceeding. ... Interveners need adequate time to become informed to decide how to participate."

Residents along four routes that were initially considered held what was billed 'the mother of all power-line meetings' at Rexall Place in December to press their case to have the line buried.

The proposal submitted by the proponents contains a provision for a portion of the line to be buried.

Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans vice-president John Kristensen said the group is "delighted" with the loosening of the rules regarding intervener standing and the effort the commission is making to ensure everyone concerned has a voice.

"I think it behooves the AUC to do this, and it really shows they've taken seriously a couple of facts. One, that there has been so much concern expressed about this Heartland line. And secondly, this is the first of those five critical transmission infrastructure projects that will go through this new process without having to go through the needs assessment part as per Bill 50, and as a result, they're going to tackle this head-on."

The commission also plans to hold evening and weekend sessions to allow area residents to make presentations without attending the full hearing. Law said residents will also have the option of submitting their concerns in writing.

AltaLink and Epcor are expected to file their application in April or May to build the line.

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