

Jan. 8/10

Strathcona not surprised by power-line location plan

HANNEKE BROOYMANS
Journal Environment Writer
EDMONTON

Strathcona County's acting mayor is disappointed but not surprised that officials with the proposed Heartland transmission-line project recommend it be built through the area east of Edmonton.

"We were hoping it might go in a different location," Peter Wlodarczak said Thursday. "The question is, who would want it?"

The Heartland project team, which consists of AltaLink and Epcor representatives, announced Wednesday they would like to run the double-circuit 500 kilovolt transmission line through the east transportation utility corridor. The route starts at the existing Ellerslie substation in southeast Edmonton and runs east and then north through the utility corridor. It then runs another 45 kilometres through Strathcona County, the city again and then Sturgeon County. All three jurisdictions have indicated they want the line buried through their regions. Many people are concerned that the electromagnetic fields generated by the line pose health risks.

The Heartland team is looking at the possibility of burying a portion of the proposed line through the eastern route. The buried portion would

“This line is being developed to benefit all Albertans and therefore we would probably say that all Albertans should bear the cost.”

Peter Wlodarczak, Strathcona County's acting mayor

run from the Ellerslie station to a point just north of Baseline Road. They will only include this suggestion in their facility application to the Alberta Utilities Commission if a study done by the Alberta Electric System Operator concludes that it is technically feasible to bury the line.

Even if they did so, the commission could decide that the extra cost, which Heartland officials estimate to be two to three times the cost of overhead lines, must be borne by the communities that want the line buried. This happened in Lethbridge and that city refused to pay the extra cost.

It would be a county council decision, but Wlodarczak said from his perspective, that's far beyond the reach of any community to pay that cost. "We're not as rich as many people perceive us to be."

Wlodarczak noted that the group "This line is being developed to benefit all Albertans and therefore we would probably say that all Albertans should bear the cost."

Wlodarczak said council has already decided it would apply for intervenor status in any hearing held by the utilities commission on the matter.

Chris Micek, Sturgeon County's commissioner, said council will decide next Tuesday whether to do the same.

The transmission line's proposed route has changed in southeast Edmonton. Heartland officials worked with Alberta Infrastructure to move the route north of an existing 240 kV line. This moves it further away from homes near the existing line. Alberta Infrastructure spokesman Darcy Scott said this is still tentative.

There are also 22 government-owned homes in the east utility corridor that are rented out. The province bought the land for the corridor in the mid-'70s.

The ministry will demolish any house in the way of the transmission line's right-of-way, Scott said, which the project team refers to as a 65 to 75 metres away for an overhead line. It's not clear yet which homes would need demolished as the plans are not final, Scott said.

hbroymans@thejournal.canwest.com