

Both AltaLink routes come with problems

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More Innisfail-area residents are coming forward voicing their concerns about the proposed route for the new AltaLink substation near Innisfail. But their concerns are different than those filed by the Town of Innisfail as mentioned in the Nov. 19 edition of the Province.

"I guess my concern stems from the article in the paper (that) made it sound like the alternate route wouldn't affect anybody, but it would affect just as many people," said Don Beardsworth who lives west of Innisfail. He said both routes aren't ideal as both plans call for a new substation that will be placed near homeowners.

The town has filed an objection to the Alberta Utilities Commission on AltaLink's plan to build a new electrical power infrastructure through the southern edge of the community, charging it will have negative economic and social impacts on the community.

The plan is part of AltaLink's proposed \$200-million redevelopment of the Red Deer transmission grid, a project that could see the construction of several substations with new power lines in the Ponoka, Innisfail and Didsbury areas.

Residents have also voiced concerns that the preferred route as identified by AltaLink would have potential health effects with substations being as close as 800 metres from their homes.

But Beardsworth said what people don't seem to realize, is if AltaLink goes with the alternate route, which would run north of town, it would result in additional transmission lines being constructed within 120 metres from his house and surrounding neighbours.

He added that the existing substation is 350 metres from his house, a lot closer than the proposed 800 metres in the southern route. He already has power lines running up and down both sides of the road. If the preferred route, to run south of town goes ahead, he may see the reduction of about three transmission lines from his area.

"The point is, the alternate route has just as many effects on people. No matter how we do it, there is going to be unhappy people," he said, noting that he would "love it" if the substation would be moved from his area but he knows that will never happen.

People had until Nov. 18 to file concerns to the Alberta Utilities Commission. Upon review, if there is any unresolved concerns there will be a public hearing.

Beardsworth said he sent in a letter of complaint as did some of his neighbours, but said he noticed from a group email, just as many people wrote letters who support the alternate route.

"This will happen; power is needed," he said of the substation getting built in one of the two areas.

"It's just we've already been affected with our land values etcetera," he said, noting when his family first moved to the area 40 years ago there was a substation about the size of a dinner table hidden by trees. The station has continued to grow over the years and he said it's not good for property values.

Whether or not AltaLink will change its mind on the preferred route is yet to be seen. Complaints received on or before Nov. 18 are currently under review to determine if there will be a public hearing to deal with unresolved issues.

Jim Law, spokesperson for Alberta Utilities Commission, said if there is to be a public hearing, notification will be issued "shortly."

"We try and set the hearing up as quickly as we can but we need to be respectful of landowners' schedules."

He said once a public hearing is held the commission makes a decision within 90 days.

-with files from Johnnie Bachusky