

Power lines threaten environment



By [Bonnie Riddell](#), Special to Sherwood Park News

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Strathcona County was recently informed that the preferred option for a proposed new 138-kV transmission line is the alignment along Highway 14 to the South Cooking Lake substation located on Range Road 220 and Township 510.

Although the official application by AltaLink to the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) has not been submitted, Strathcona County council is committed to ensuring that our municipality's voice is heard at the subsequent hearings.

As a matter of fact, Strathcona County got involved in the regulatory process at its first opportunity back in February when we intervened at the AUC hearings to challenge the Alberta Electrical Systems Operator (AESO) needs document. At that time, the commission determined that the county's concerns about environmental impacts of this proposed line through the Beaver Hills Moraine must be addressed along with their application.

The main issue for this municipality is the significant environmental impact to the landscape within the Beaver Hills, as it is a very unique and natural ecosystem with a varied habitat that houses sensitive flora and fauna. The biodiversity located in the moraine is unique in that it cannot be found in the surrounding agricultural and urban landscapes. There is ongoing growth pressures in the region that continue to threaten this environmentally sensitive area, and this proposed transmission line is another development that will not benefit the residents of Strathcona County.

The proposed line is running through an area which is protected from further fragmentation by Strathcona County's Municipal Development Plan special policy area. The policy does not allow for further subdivision development in the moraine, so increased residential population will not happen in this area. The proposed line is to service increases in demand in the Leduc and Beaumont area. Why then is Strathcona County being asked to bear the burden of this infrastructure?

As well, to assist landowners in the area, Strathcona County has hosted several resident meetings at South Cooking Lake. We informed residents of their rights and obligations by inviting the farmer's advocate to come out and speak, plus the AUC sent a representative to address the regulatory process and how landowners can get involved. I have committed to continue hosting these open dialogue sessions as this process continues.

As a municipality, our administration will continue to collect environmental and other impact assessments to be used at the hearing once the formal application has been made. This council is committed to participate in the regulatory process as a formal intervener and will continue to send its concerns to AltaLink. We have stated that our preference for the transmission line alignment would be AltaLink's alternate route, which is located in Leduc County.

Strathcona County is not supportive of major initiatives that have little or no benefit to our residents and have further environmental impacts on the Beaver Hills Moraine, which is home to a national park and bird sanctuary. We are concerned about landowner impacts and the constraints it might place on agricultural operations, along with other area development limitations this transmission line may place on us.

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