

# Power lines staying put after vote

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The AltaLink power lines — accused of killing hundreds of birds in mid-flight — are staying put after a St. Albert city council decision Monday night to jot them down as unfunded.

Mayor Nolan Crouse said decisions on a new park in the same area as the lines have not been finalized, leaving the power line decision untimely.

He did not say when the decision will be made, but the power line replacement project was never in the budget. After his motion, it will be considered in next year's deliberations.

Only Coun. Carol Watamaniuk opposed the motion.

Watamaniuk said there is no guarantee funding that is already

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earmarked for the project from AltaLink, power company, and the Alberta government, will be available if the project is put in "limbo."

AltaLink said they would pay \$450,000 for relocation, the province agreed to grant \$300,000 and the City would pay about \$450,000, minus any other grant money that the

they would receive.

Bill Holtby, city manager, said he "wouldn't be surprised if [AltaLink and the province] decided not to co-operate."

"This has been a real circus," Watamaniuk said. "Making this decision without AltaLink is wrong."

She claims city council last year put \$350,000 aside for the project.

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But Mayor Nolan Crouse said the 2007 council only said to write the item down as a business case.

"The good news is this is now a line item," he said. "This is to show it as unfunded."

The power lines will stay stretched over a vast wetland in the western portion of St. Albert, an ideal airspace for countless birds that are condemned to a short lifespan when they are blindsided by the thin wires.

After various environmental groups protested in defense of the birds, AltaLink and the province offered to help the City of St. Albert reposition the lines.

The recommended destination after the planned scrapping of the current location, was along Ray Gibbon Drive, 650 metres away from the wetland. After city councillors said that location would destroy

aesthetics, they wanted to either bury the wires or hide them in an above-ground path. Both were about \$6.5 million more expensive than the \$1.1-million Ray Gibbon Drive plan that was already approximately 70 per cent funded.

Council were told they would be denied funding by several preenters and on Nov. 10, Lloyd Snelgrove, president of the Alberta Treasury Board, proved critics right by saying "no."

Environmentalists, along with scientists, came up with the Ray Gibbon Drive relocation plan.

Leah Jackson of the City of St. Albert's environment office said in November at a budget meeting that, if the lines were clumped into the same area as other wildlife threats, such as roadways and buildings, the animals would not venture into the area.