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# Power line moved to budget debate

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The fate of the Big Lake power line will be decided by St. Albert's budget.

City council moved Monday to put a business case for moving the power line into the 2009-11 budget deliberations and to seek any available grants to fund it.

The move follows through on a report from administration and the Environmental Advisory Committee last month that supported moving the line to follow Ray Gibbon Drive at a cost of about \$1.05 million — \$450,000 from the city and \$750,000 from line owner AltaLink and the province.

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It also follows on a meeting last week, when MLA Ken Allred told the city that the province was not likely to support burying the line at a cost of \$6.3 million.

The 128-kilovolt transmission line cuts across a high-traffic bird area in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. Environmentalists, the Hole family, the province and AltaLink have called for the line to be moved or buried because it is killing birds and interfering with park aesthetics.

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LORIE GARRITTY  
Councillor

City manager Bill Holtby told council the line's precise route is still conceptual and it would likely be adjusted to account for its proximity to a nearby soccer field and Ray Gibbon Drive's right-of-way — two of its common criticisms. "We wouldn't be proceeding with construction without coming back and giving you some precise information."

Holtby suspected the city might be able to apply for funds from the provincial Community Facility Enhancement or Major Community Facilities, but said the \$300,000 the city had already received from the province might limit what it could get.

## Tight votes

Coun. Lorie Garritty tried to amend the motion, originally made by Coun. Carol Watamaniuk on Oct. 27, to specifically recommend the city move the line to follow Ray Gibbon Drive — the alignment dubbed "option three" in administration's report to council. Option one did not move the line; two moved it 345 metres away but was considered unlikely; four moved it to follow Riel Drive; five and six involved burying it or running it along the ground.

"We've tested the reality of the more expensive options and I don't think they're going to fly any time soon," Garritty said, adding this route was a good compromise and debating all the routes again would not be a good use of council's time. "Let's decide this tonight and get on with the job."

Bracko opposed this amendment and the idea of spending any money on moving the line. His research suggests moving the line to follow Ray Gibbon would actually lead to more bird deaths and would not enhance the beauty of the park at all. "This would be a waste of taxpayer dollars," he said. "The best solution may be to let [the lines] stay where they are."

Watamaniuk said she was baffled by Bracko's remarks, noting the line move had been studied and recommended by provincial, AltaLink and city officials. "I just want to remind Coun. Bracko that we would not be spending \$1 million. We have partners."

Coun. Gareth Jones suspected the line move would probably cost a lot more than \$1 million due to cost overruns, noting the nearby Riel Park landfill remediation has already become something of a money pit.

This was an opportunity to take part in a historic partnership, Watamaniuk said. "Please don't shoot it down yet. Please let it get to the budget process so we can take a look at it properly."

Garritty's amendment was defeated 5-2, with Garritty and Watamaniuk supporting it. Watamaniuk's motion passed 4-3, with Bracko, Coun. Roger Lemieux and Mayor Nolan Crouse opposed.

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