

City will be expected to honour its original agreement

Province, AltaLink reject city's plan

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AltaLink and the province flat-out rejected the city's proposal this week that they pay the full cost of burying the Big Lake power line.

A 138-kilovolt transmission line near Big Lake has been criticized for killing birds and disrupting views in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. The Alberta government and AltaLink, which owns the line, had offered to split the cost of moving the line — about \$1.05 million — with the city.

City council defeated a motion Monday to partially fund the move, supporting instead a motion to ask the province and AltaLink to pay the full cost of putting the line underground or running it along the ground. Administration had put the cost of burial at about \$6 million. The still-theoretical on-ground plan, where the line would be built into a walkway, would cost \$8 million.

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation was not likely to support this proposal, said spokesperson Dan Huang. "As far as we're concerned, we had an agreement in place, and that agreement was with AltaLink and the City of St. Albert to relocate the transmission line, not to bury it."

The department had already given the city \$300,000 towards that plan, Huang noted. He was uncertain how much more money it could add to that. "When you go from several thousand dollars to relocate something to \$7 to \$8 million, that's huge."

It's too early to say what will happen to the location of the park's proposed interpretive centre if an agreement can't be reached, Huang said. "The chances of us supporting this [proposal]? Well, you can do the math. Eight million dollars is a lot of money."

AltaLink would not pay to bury the line on its own, said spokesperson Scott Schreiner. "It's an enormous cost we would not be able to undertake."

His company has pledged to spend \$450,000 on any line move.

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SCOTT SCHREINER
AltaLink

The Alberta Utilities Commission has the final say over all of AltaLink's costs, Schreiner said, and those costs are passed on to all electricity users through higher fees. "We don't believe the expense to put that line underground is a prudent cost to the ratepayers of Alberta," he said, and would not be one they would feel comfortable asking the commission to approve.

Coun. James Burrows said in council Monday that AltaLink had buried power lines before for aesthetic reasons in Kananaskis Country. Those lines were actually in the Three Sisters development west of Kananaskis, Schreiner said, and the \$15-million cost of burial was paid for by the developer, not ratepayers.

Schreiner said his company would keep working with the city to find a solution for the line problem. "We remain committed to relocating that line to reduce bird collisions in the park, but it needs to be a responsible decision."

Bill Hole, son of Lois Hole, said he supported the city's proposal to bury the power line. "The ideal situation is that the line is buried," he said. He was confident all parties would find a way to make it happen. "I don't think this is an easy process. It's not something that is commonly done."

Burrows, who made the motion to bury the line Monday, said he would wait for an official response from AltaLink and the province before making any comments.

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