

# City receives powerful advice

by **PHILLIP WOOLGAR**

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City council's decision to seek funding from the provincial government to bury power lines was nearsighted, says the St. Albert Environmental Advisory Committee.

Last week, council voted in favour of turning down a plan to relocate the lines — which run across a wetland on the west side of the city — replacing it with a motion to seek funding from the provincial government to place the lines under or just above ground.

That venture would require approximately \$6.5 million more than what the province was originally going to fork out.

Jason Cooke, spokesperson for the Environmental Advisory Committee, said the increased amount is unlikely.

Cooke said council should pursue the original plan, which was to relocate the power lines to Ray Gibbon Drive, 650 metres away. That option costs \$1.1 million. AltaLink — the company that provides the majority of electricity in Alberta — were already giving \$450,000 for that option and the province would give \$300,000. Council was asked to give \$450,000, which included a contingency if costs went above budget.

"The funding for that option represents a unique opportunity that can have real benefits," Cooke said. "We believe the council would be ill-advised to believe that the province would pay for a burial of transfer lines. We must point out the misunderstanding."

Last week, council said some of the wetland is on Crown land, so the province should pay the bill. But according to Cooke, only a very small portion of the land is the province's.

"This is City property," he said.

Cooke said the original project could potentially receive funding from various environmental organizations.

He said the underground option requires deep trenches, which would destroy much of the habitat.

"Underground substations are required," he said. "They require oil, which could potentially leak."

Coun. Carol Watamaniuk said Cooke is much more educated about the matter than council is.

"I feel that Mr. Cooke has brought some very valuable information this evening," she said. "Let's put it in the 2009-2011 budget so we can review it at that time."

She said more information needs to be gathered before an intelligent decision can be made.

Council decided to wait till after a meeting with the province that is scheduled for Nov. 10 before considering Cooke's recommendation. They want to see if the province will pay for the under or the just-above ground option.

Councillors Lorie Garritty and Watamaniuk opposed.

Council has intended to relocate the power lines for more than three years because countless birds are killed after flying into the thin wires.