

# Council should take second look at power line move

Never look a gift horse in the mouth, says one old proverb.

But that may be precisely what city council has done by voting not to follow through on the commitment of a previous St. Albert city council to move the AltaLink transmission line near Big Lake away from a flight path used by migratory birds.

It's pretty clear the province would like the line moved. The provincial government ponied up \$300,000 for the project, which, along with a commitment for \$450,000 from AltaLink and \$350,000 to \$450,000 from the City of St. Albert, could have got the job done.

Our provincial government may have a far-from-perfect environmental record and no difficulty getting re-elected regardless, but it's savvy enough to recognize that an unsightly 138-kilovolt power line known to be a deadly hazard to avian life is just not the thing to have running right through a showpiece bird-watching facility.

And the province is sure to

be putting quite a bit more than \$300,000 into the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park interpretive centre, which could have been located in South Riel Park next to the Hole family's planned new retail and greenhouse complex.

The province is almost certainly unhappy with council's decision to drop the 2006 commitment to move the line. At the same time, it and AltaLink are extremely unlikely to fork over the \$6 million to \$8 million required to bury the line. Indeed, council's motion to ask the province and AltaLink to pay the full freight to put the line underground, passed 4-3 on Oct. 20, looks like a ploy to kybosh the project.

So expect the provincial government to respond by putting its new Lois Hole interpretive centre somewhere else in the park, well outside the city limits of St. Albert.

David Climenhaga



Politically Incorrect

There's now plenty of dry land within park boundaries on the Edmonton side.

Council will have saved taxpayers up to \$450,000 up front — an understandable wish in what is sure to be a politically difficult budgeting process. But they will have cost us a world-

class environmental interpretive centre, plus the chances that go with it for sustainable jobs, tax revenue and enviro-tourism income. In addition, they will have dealt a blow to the hopes of one of our city's most successful businesses.

This doesn't sound like a good trade-off. Council had a bird in the hand — to borrow another old proverb — with the agreement to move the transmission line for a modest price tag. Now it's got none in hand, and none in the bush either.

What should council do now? A good starting place would be to ask City administration to produce a

report on the true likelihood of the province being willing to spend \$6 million or more to bury the line. A call by a city official to either of our Progressive Conservative MLAs — backbencher Ken Allred or Minister of Advanced Education and Technology Doug Horner — should be enough to make it crystal clear that this particular bird is not going to fly.

With that reality in writing, council would have an opportunity to reconsider and accept the strong recommendation of its own Environmental Advisory Committee to honour the previous commitment. [Click to Zoom Out](#)

If they do, they can rightly sell it to voters as the most cost-effective decision under the circumstances. If the interpretive centre gets built in Riel Park as a result, they will have improved the city's tax position over the long term.

Come the next election in 2010, they will have a real accomplishment to point to with pride in the face of inevitable criticism over tax rates. To quote one final proverb: Fortune favours the brave!