

City may go underground with electric lines

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 16 June 2011 13:23 -



Maintenance, logistic problems reason.

Dealing with downed power lines during a raging blizzard is not a favorite part of the job for Gothenburg's electric crew.

Nor is trying to squeeze a digger truck between trees in a resident's back yard to fix an electrical problem.

Because of these issues, city officials are looking at going underground.

A proposal under consideration by Gothenburg's City Council would have the crew stringing wire underground throughout town, a little at a time.

The council discussed the matter at a June 7 meeting before deciding to revisit the proposal at a later date.

Members discussed the city contributing up to \$500 or more if a homeowner decides to convert overhead service to underground.

Under the plan, city administrator Bruce Clymer said the homeowner would be responsible for the change which would include the hiring of an electrician, obtaining permits, trenching for the new line and other things.

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City electrical foreman Mike Libich estimated that cost to be \$1,000 to \$1,200 minus what the city would pay.

The service line, which would be owned by the property owner, would be connected to a city-provided meter pedestal.

If a homeowner didn't choose to participate, the city would abandon the pole and it would become the property of the homeowner.

"If the pole falls over, it's the homeowner's responsibility to take care of it," Clymer said.

Council member Gary Fritch wondered if the policy would be explained to homeowners before they are affected.

Libich said it would, noting that cable television wires would be included in the underground wiring as it is now in most overhead lines.

Electrical department employee Kasey Bogus said he liked the idea of underground wires because overhead lines are more difficult to maintain.

Council members looked at two areas where the electrical crew has experienced numerous problems with rotting poles and logistical difficulties—Avenue A to B from 18th to 20th and between Grand Crescent and Highland Drive from Lake Avenue to Avenue F.

Approximate cost for the first project would be \$28,560 with the second one costing about \$35,080.

Clymer said the city has budgeted \$65,000 this year for upgrades in either of the areas

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considered.

“Any monies paid out to homeowners would be expensed out of this project,” he said.

Libich noted that it probably costs just as much to maintain overhead poles and lines as to take the lines underground which would be done by digging holes and then boring underground.

Council president Jeff Kennedy wondered how entities that own multiple homes such as Gothenburg Housing Authority could afford to pay for conversions.

Clymer said maybe the city could but that might not be fair to other taxpayers.

Council members discussed bidding the project but Clymer said he didn't want the city to become a personal contractor, noting that the city would also have to hire an electrical engineering and pay for bid specifications.

If they decide to begin the project, council members agreed to do the Grand Crescent and Highland Drive project which involves services to about 20 homes.

Before proceeding, however, Mayor Joyce Hudson said she wants feedback from residents about the project.

In other business, the council:

approved an addition to the city's health care plan for 2011-12. For spouses and dependents to be eligible for health care insurance under a city employee's plan, they must not be eligible for another group or government plan.

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Council members renewed the employees' health insurance plan with current carrier Corporate Plan Management at a May meeting.

appointed Randy Burge to the Community Development Authority and John Stuhr to the Gothenburg Volunteer Fire Department.

Burge will fill a vacancy left by Jack Kniss.

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