

[←--back to story](#)

Wanna buy a power plant?

Council to evaluate interest in facility

By Jenny Lancour

POSTED: August 8, 2008

ESCANABA - Though Escanaba's power plant is not for sale, the city council decided Thursday to find out if anyone is interested in buying it.

In a 4-1 vote Thursday, council passed a resolution to determine if there is any interest from the private sector to buy or rent the power plant. Councilman Tom Warstler voted against the idea.

For the past few years, officials have been looking ahead on how to supply residents and businesses with the most economical and reliable energy to meet the city's increasing demand for power. The existing coal-fueled power plant just turned 50 years old.

Officials have explored various options - such as building a new plant or converting the facility to biomass or a cheaper coal - but no option to date has been economically feasible.

"This doesn't mean we're going to sell the plant or lease it," said City Manager Jim O'Toole at Thursday's meeting. He described this move as the next step in the fact-finding process.

Last month, the city's Electrical Advisory Committee (EAC) made the recommendation to seek private interest in the plant. Council discussed the issue at its July 24 meeting but took no action.

Electrical Superintendent Mike Furmanski said the recommendation could determine, "if we were to offer it for sale, would someone want to buy it."

Councilman Gilbert Cheves added the proposal's purpose is "to see if there's interest in acquiring the plant for independent operation...I think the important thing is to investigate whether there is interest."

Cheves added seeking private interest in the plant is part of the process of exploring all the power supply options and moving forward. "It's prudent to evaluate whether or not there is interest," he said.

Councilman Brady Nelson agreed and said, "We're getting answers to the unknown and moving forward."

Councilwoman Patricia Baribeau said council can't make an informed decision in the future without getting all the information it can, including finding out if there's any interest in buying the plant.

Mayor Leo Evans agreed the city needs to "know what they're dealing with."

Warstler opposed the idea of seeking interest in buying or leasing the power plant unless the city is actually ready to sell. He said it is "premature unless we're really putting it on the market." He added he doesn't disagree with anything council members said on the issue.

Article Photos



As a requirement for his communications merit badge, Matt Lanaville of Escanaba Boy Scout Troop 411, listens as city council members discuss power supply options with Electrical Superintendent Mike Furmanski at the podium. (Daily Press photo by Jenny Lancour)

[Subscribe to Daily Press](#)