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By Jenny Lancour for the Daily Press

ESCANABA - Escanaba has been looking into building a larger and more efficient power plant for several years. Though the process is progressing, it will take several more years before a new plant becomes reality.

The city needs a new plant because its existing 25-megawatt plant is not very efficient and is getting old, said Robert Headden, electrical superintendent.

The facility went into service in 1958, nearly 50 years ago. Since then, the city has grown considerably and so has its power needs, he said. During the past few years, the power plant has exceeded its plant capacity to meet demands.

Because the power load fluctuates in the city during the day and night, when the power demand exceeds the plant's capacity, the city has to rely on buying power from the transmission system which may not always be available, Headden said. The city's other alternative is to use its peak generator to produce more power which is more expensive, he added. There are limited hours on the peaking generator, he added. "We've exceeded capacity of the plant. Our load is greater than our plant can actually put out," Headden said.

A power supply study conducted in 2002 showed the least costly way to meet the city's increasing power needs was to construct a new facility. The larger the plant, the lower the unit cost of power will be, Headden said.

Prices for a new plant range from approximately \$100 million for a 57-megawatts facility to about \$450 million for a 250-megawatts operation, Headden estimated.

To help offset the cost for Escanaba, it is hoped the city could partner with another entity that would share in the price of the new plant in exchange for owning a share in the new facility, Headden said. Wisconsin Public Power Inc. (WPPI) is considering such an agreement, he added. WPPI buys into power plants to supply power for several municipalities in the region.

For now, WPPI is paying half the costs for necessary studies but no formal partnership has been made between the two parties, he added. A third party could also be an option to negotiate to lessen costs further, he said.