

Power future taking focus



Members of Escanaba's Electric Advisory Board listen to a presentation on various power plant options for the city Wednesday. The board will analyze the information and make a recommendation on building a new facility, modifying or continuing with the existing facility, or the city purchasing power wholesale. (Daily Press photo by Jenny Lancour)

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ESCANABA — Escanaba has come to a turning point as it decides which direction it's going to go in meeting the city's future power needs.

Information was presented on different-size power plants and various technologies to generate electricity during an Electric Advisory Board meeting Wednesday at city hall.

The city is looking into building a new power plant because its current facility is nearly 50 years old, is outdated and inefficient, and is not meeting the city's electric demands.

John Yost presented the power plant options to those in attendance and to those viewing the meeting live on cable television. Yost is the study manager from Sargent & Lundy, the Chicago engineering firm hired to conduct the feasibility study.

During his presentation, Yost commented on Escanaba's partnership with Wisconsin Public Power, Inc. Both parties are looking at the feasibility of jointly constructing a new plant in Escanaba. He said there are advantages of the two parties working together to build a larger facility because of economies of scale reducing costs for both.

WPPI is a nonprofit municipal electric utility that serves 48 municipal utilities, supplying electricity to more than 185,000 customers in Wisconsin, Iowa and the Upper Peninsula. WPPI is interested in partnering with Escanaba to build a power plant to provide its customers with electricity at the most economical price and to increase the buying power of the municipal utilities, said Andy Keller, WPPI's director of project development.

Yost explained information provided Wednesday represented half of the feasibility study. Phase 2 of the report will be completed by Sargent & Lundy in June after the city and WPPI decide on what size plant and what technology the new facility would use, if they decide to go that route.

During Yost's Powerpoint presentation, the feasibility study recommended building a power plant on the city's existing property. The study analyzed plant sizes of 60, 150 and 300 megawatts offering information on permits, emissions, construction costs, fuel options, turbine options and a proposed project schedule.

"It's up to us now to take this information and work with it ... and determine which way we want to go with it," said Gilbert Cheves, project consultant for the city.

Based on economies of scale, the firm recommended constructing a 300-megawatt facility using

coal to produce power with wood waste as an option. This size plant would have the lowest overall production cost.

In the next few weeks, the electric advisory board and WPPI will study the feasibility study and make a recommendation on which option the city should pursue.

Building a new power plant is just one option. Other alternatives, Cheves told those in attendance, are to continue with the existing facility, modify the existing plant, or buy power wholesale.

The Electric Advisory Board will meet 5:15 p.m. May 9 at city hall to receive more public input and discuss the city's power options.