

Editorial: City electrical meeting may be worth attending

If you think attending Wednesday's Escanaba Electrical Advisory Committee meeting might be as interesting as watching paint dry, you may want to reconsider.

The board's regular monthly meeting at 5:15 p.m. at city hall will include a public presentation on an engineering feasibility study of the city's future electrical options.

Still sounds like drying paint? Then consider these questions:

-- Electrical rates in Escanaba are a bit on the high end compared to other cities in the region. Can those rates be more competitive in the future — meaning, will your bills go down? Also, if lower rates are likely, what will that mean for current and future business/industry?

-- Escanaba provides very reliable electricity. If there are changes in the way Escanaba produces or receives electricity, will that source be as reliable or even more reliable than the current power plant?

-- Can Escanaba attract even small- or medium-size industry? Or, is the city's power infrastructure and power plant so limited that, if 30-50 new jobs could show up within a few months, the city would have to reject those jobs without wholesale changes in its power source or electrical grid?

-- Should Escanaba remain a player in providing energy, or get out of the business and purchase energy wholesale?

The city's power plant is nearly 50 years old, is outdated and inefficient compared to new power plants, and cannot meet Escanaba's growing electric needs.

Gilbert Cheves is project manager for the city's energy supply plan. With a myriad of changes both regionally and nationally in laws and practices that affect the delivery of electricity and construction of new plants, this process could lead to the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars, with a good portion of that being spent by the city. Obviously, this effort demands all due consideration, and all indications are that it is being done.

The latest available information from an engineering feasibility study will be discussed at Wednesday's meeting.

The study will paint a picture of the city's future power situation if it stays status quo, builds a power plant on its own or adds to its current plant, partners with a major utility to build a much bigger plant, or gets out of the electrical production business and buys wholesale.

The city and Wisconsin Public Power Inc. (WPPI) are paying for the study as they consider partnering in construction of a plant.

The city's Electrical Advisory Committee will play a major role in this process as it considers all options before making a recommendation to city council.

We suggest you attend Wednesday's meeting both in an effort to stay informed and to share your questions and thoughts. Your input is being sought, and would be much appreciated.