

Editorial: City, Cheves have done their homework

The city of Escanaba has come a long way in deciding its electrical future. It's been a thorough, reasonable and effective process. Although city council, city administrators and the city Electric Advisory Committee all have played roles in this ongoing effort, one man deserves a lion's share of the credit: Gil Cheves.

Cheves is a local consultant named the point guard in considering all options in light of what is by today's standards the city's small and outdated power plant.

It's funny how an informed decision, on a very complex subject, using good information provided in a study done by a reputable firm can make all the difference in the world. And Cheves was the voice of reason — a rather informed voice, by the way — throughout this positive and constructive journey.

With a price tag of hundreds of millions of dollars, Escanaba simply couldn't take all the risk building a new power plant. It instead tried to find a utility with deep pockets and much expertise to partner in this project. With relatively cheap electricity being available on the open market, and facing unknown regulatory measures plus the unknown costs thereof, a partner could not be found.

The city has a lot going for it. It has a reliable plant at a wonderful site. Its mostly likely options appear to be updating this plant in conjunction with buying power off the grid.

In his last recommendation, Cheves says the city should pursue that option as long as its cost of production is in the same ballpark as rates it can pay for electricity from other utilities. Escanaba's rates are no longer competitive with other communities, and the business sector wants that to change.

Cheves now says he would like to continue to serve the city, this time as a volunteer on the EAC instead of as a paid consultant. The city should take him up on his offer. His help has been invaluable.