

Salt Lake City power-line plan stirs wrath of councilmen

They say the project would reduce value of residents' homes

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Luke Garrott said he's "steamin' mad" and fellow Salt Lake City Council newcomer JT Martin is equally irritated over Rocky Mountain Power's plans to upgrade a transmission line in a residential area along 800 South between 1100 East and 1900 East.

The two first-year council members made their opposition to the project clear to Rocky Mountain Power representatives Tuesday afternoon during a City Council work session.

The project calls for the power company's 46,000-volt line to be converted to 138,000 volts, raising the 40-plus power poles' height by about 10 feet to 85 feet tall and increasing their width by about 8 inches.

The bigger, taller power poles will be located in people's yards, Martin said, negatively impacting the value of their homes and possibly posing health risks to those living in close proximity.

"No one really knows what the health concerns are from those power lines," he said.

Garrott and Martin both took issue with Rocky Mountain Power officials' claims that the upgrade on 800 South is needed to meet growth in the area — which already is built out — as well as surrounding areas.

Alene Bentley, community manager for Rocky Mountain Power, said people's power demands continue to increase, even in built-out areas.

But Martin questioned whether the need for upgrades are driven by increased power demands at neighboring University of Utah.

"If the lion's share of (power) is going to our good neighbors at the University of Utah but it's impacting the back yards of these (Salt Lake City residents), I need to know that," he said.

Garrott criticized Rocky Mountain Power officials for settling on converting to higher-voltage lines to meet energy demands without giving residents a choice to reduce their consumption or by producing power on site through alternate energy methods such as solar.

"This is yesterday's plan," he said, "and I'm going to be opposing it every step of the way."

State statute provides municipalities the option to bury power lines as long as they cover the cost difference for above-and below-ground construction. According to bids received by Rocky Mountain Power, burying the lines would increase the cost of the \$6.3 million project to \$28.4 million, leaving the city to cover the \$22.1 million.

A straw-poll vote of the City Council indicated that cost difference is too great to justify, though the action wasn't ruled out. The City Council also has the option of contesting the proposed site of the line to the Electric Facilities Siting Review Board, which was set up to mediate disputes.

Council chairwoman Jill Remington Love said the city will seek the advice of city attorneys and staff before any decisions are made. The council also hopes to determine how much big institutional uses such as the U. are draining from the power line.

Rocky Mountain Power officials helped fuel the opposition by engaging in easement negotiations with property owners in May 2007 before providing the City Council with estimates for burying the transmission line. The power company reached agreements with 15 of the 41 property owners on the route.

"Our property agents got a little overanxious in trying to move this project along," Bentley said. "We were asked to put a halt to that, and we have."

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