

# Hinsdale's utility to be arduous work

By Seth Ufheil  
Staff writer

Initial figures affirm Hinsdale's bid to provide its residents electricity, but immediate changes should not be expected.

Indeed, numbers do not speak well of Commonwealth Edison's service reliability to customers in the village.

In 2005, for instance, residents experienced power outages at a rate four times greater than the power giant's systemwide average, according to the village. Two years ago,

Hinsdale customers individually endured an average 4.5 outages, up 36 percent from 2004.

Also, a first look at ComEd's electrical equipment found about 70 percent to be fully depreciated, or more than 30 to 35 years old, according to Iowa-based Latham & Associates, a company contracted by Hinsdale to determine the feasibility of becoming a public utility.

"The statistics are the best indicator of the service we're getting," said Cindy Williams, a trustee in charge of Hinsdale's exploration

of municipally owned electricity. "We have not seen measurable change."

Still, the village is approaching the issue methodically.

A full feasibility study will be presented in two weeks, town hall meetings will follow and trustees will decide Tuesday, Feb. 6, whether to put the initiative before voters as an advisory referendum in April. If the measure succeeds in the consolidated election, a year of negotiations with ComEd could begin before

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the village asks as early as March 2008 whether residents are willing to help fund the formation of a public electrical utility, Williams said.

State law mandates three questions must be approved by voters before a municipality can provide electricity: Permission to pursue the formation of a publicly owned power utility; permission to sell electricity at a retail price; and approval for bonds to be issued for a to-be-determined amount of money to make the transition happen.

If trustees decide to act next month, voters would be asked whether they favor pursuing the utility idea, Williams said.

A spokesman for ComEd said improving service reliability in Hinsdale is an ongoing priority for the company.

Cornell Barnett, director of external affairs at ComEd's Bolingbrook office, attributed a greater frequency of outages in Hinsdale to mature trees, wildlife and rocky weather.

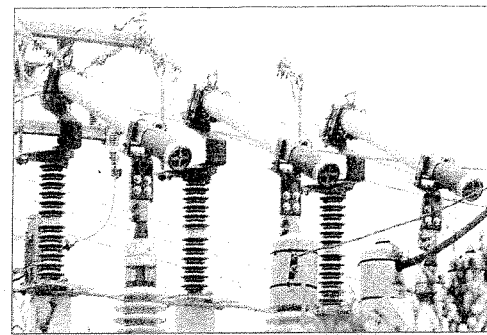
"Hinsdale has really been hit by a lot of storms," he said, adding service improvements occurred in the latter months of 2006 but have yet to be shown statistically.

"Our goal is reliable power, and our relationship (with Hinsdale) is very good," Barnett said.

A healthy working relationship might not be able to withstand an expected increases of more than 20 percent to residents' power bills this year, as a 10-year rate freeze ends.

Williams said reliability and the lowest possible rate are the village's principal goals in exploring whether to become a public utility.

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The village of Hinsdale is in the preliminary stages of considering whether to provide electricity to its residents, rather than rely on Commonwealth Edison. Poor service and an imminent spike in power bills prompted the village to explore the idea.

## What's ahead

### 2007

**Jan. 23:** A feasibility study will be presented to village about becoming a public utility.

**Feb. 6:** After a Jan. 25 town hall meeting, Village Board will vote whether to put the initiative on April ballot.

**April 17:** If trustees decide to go forward, voters will be asked via referendum whether they approve of the idea. If approved, a year of negotiations between the village and Commonwealth Edison over the purchase of power distribution equipment is expected.

### 2008

**March 18:** Barring further negotiations, the village expects to ask voters in a final referendum if they approve of the funding for the public utility.

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