

The Hinsdalean

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Hinsdale residents to vote in April on village electric utility

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Hinsdale voters will face two referendum questions asking permission for the village to create an electric utility on Tuesday, April 17.

One question will allow the village to operate a utility, and the second question triggers the first enabling ordinance. Trustees voted 5-0 Tuesday to place the questions on the ballot. Trustee Michael Smith was absent.

The referendum questions are the first step in a lengthy process, officials said. The two ordinances only authorize the village to operate a public utility. Additional ordinances must be adopted later for the village to acquire ComEd's facilities and to collect revenue.

"We are on a mission to make this town a better place to live," Village President Mike Woerner said. "I don't have a burning desire to build a utility — I just want service."

If approved by voters, the utility would remain in place until trustees vote to revoke the authority.



Fidel Marquez, vice president of ComEd's Chicago operations, told trustees Tuesday that the utility company has detailed plans to upgrade Hinsdale's service. He also pointed out that ComEd's service has improved during the past year.

In 2005, data showed Hinsdale customers experienced 4.6 interruptions per year; the average ComEd customer had 1.2 interruptions. But data from December 2006 revealed that the number of interruptions in Hinsdale dropped to 3.3 while the average increased to 1.5. Naperville, which provides its own electric service to residents, has an average of .6 interruptions.

Village officials will continue to talk with ComEd officials about solutions, they said.

But the service plan Marquez referenced is one that has been around for a while, said Trustee Cindy Williams, who leads the municipal utility task force.

"It could be viewed as an account maintenance plan. Essentially a lot of what has been offered to us already is part of the 2006-07 plan," she said.

Resident Craig Chapello, who served on the task force, said the village has to move forward.

"This ordinance is a no-brainer — it says we can move forward," he said.

Fellow task force member Gary Spitzer agreed that the frequency and duration of outages are too high.

"I got to the point that I decided I had to put in a back-up generator. There were too many outages," he said.

Woerner said he is assembling a group of people who will lead the referendum campaign.

"It will be a campaign of education," Woerner said. "We want to get the facts out there. We will have some more town hall meetings. I wanted ComEd tonight to give everyone a chance to get everything out on the table."