

# Electricity idea still has sparks

*Board agrees to spend \$25,000 to look into village-owned utility*

**By Brian Boyle**

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An Iowa engineering firm will help Hinsdale trustees decide if establishing a village-owned electric company is a worthwhile idea.

The trustees Tuesday hired Lathom and Associates of Cedar Rapids for \$25,000 for a feasibility study.

Timing will be important, as village trustees are trying to meet a deadline. The engineering firm started work right away to give trustees a preliminary estimate of how much the village would pay for ComEd equipment to operate an electric company.

If trustees believe the idea still is worth pursuing, they will put a referendum on the spring ballot to ask voters' opinion. They must pass a resolution by Feb. 13 to put a question before voters in the April 17 election. The engineering firm believes it can have a preliminary estimate within four to five weeks.

If voters approve the idea, village offi-

cials will begin negotiating with ComEd over the price of its equipment.

The contract with the Iowa firm could increase to as much as \$45,000 if work continues past April.

Timing was so important to village trustees that they approved the \$25,000 contract with Lathom and Associates before going through the formal bid process. Trustees approved soliciting bids from other firms, but they are confident Lathom and Associates will be the lowest bidder. Informally, other firms said their work would cost as much as \$150,000.

Village trustees are going through this process because they, and other residents, are unhappy with ComEd service. The number of power outages in Hinsdale is three to four times higher than in towns elsewhere in the ComEd system, village manager Dave Cook said.

"The bottom line is that we need reliable, dependable electric service," Cook said.

A month ago, Village President Michael Woerner asked Trustee Cindy Williams to lead a task force to study alternatives to receiving electricity from ComEd.

The last time a town tried to create its own electric company was eight years

ago in Riverdale, Cook said.

Task force members, which include former Trustee Rich Ciccarone, studied the village's agreement with ComEd, Illinois law and other cases in which towns formed their own electric companies. The task force sought out engineering firms recommended by the Illinois Municipal Electric Agency.

Some firms did not want to go up against ComEd, Williams said.

Lathom and Associates has prepared more than 36 studies like this in the past three years. The firm is preparing testimony for six Iowa cities in the process of acquiring electric systems.

The firm deals with a different electric company, not ComEd.

ComEd at some point will give the task force and the engineering firm a tour of its equipment in Hinsdale, Williams said.

"They have been very cooperative," she said.

With the engineering firm hired, task force members now will try to educate residents about what they are doing.

"Essentially we would be taking power into our own hands if we own our own system," Williams said.

*— Brian Boyle is a contributing writer.*