Bellevue's energy dilemma | Letter

Sunday, January 14, 2018 9:30am | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The city of Bellevue is facing a major decision within the next few months. The city's hearing examiner and the City Council will evaluate the potential benefits and detriments of Puget Sound Energy's "Energize Eastside" project, an 18-mile transmission line through Bellevue and three other Eastside cities.

As a former chairman of the Bellevue Planning Commission, I have concerns about this project. When I served on the commission, our role was to "preserve and protect single-family residential areas" according to the city's Comprehensive Plan. The plan is designed to maintain the vitality, quality and character of both single-family and multi-family residential neighborhoods.

As a commissioner I thought of the city as a machine in which every part works together for the benefit of neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Energize Eastside appears to place burdens on residents and neighborhoods to facilitate rapid development in downtown Bellevue and the new Spring

District. However, the premise of the project has been thrown into doubt by new technology and declining consumption of electricity.

PSE is repeating the same mistake Seattle City Light made in recent years. Both utilities anticipated increasing demand for electricity due to population growth. However, demand has been falling in Seattle and the Eastside despite the growing population and economy. These trends are occurring across the country due to climate change, conservation, renewable energy, and more efficient lighting, computers and appliances. PSE's revenues have been declining for years, providing the company with an economic incentive to promote a transmission line. The $300 million project will increase PSE's revenues and utility bills for customers for decades.

Other cities are installing safer, less expensive alternatives, such as large batteries manufactured by Tesla and other companies. Batteries can be installed in less than three months and provide better reliability than a new transmission line for a fraction of the cost. Batteries also reduce carbon emissions by storing cheap solar and wind energy during periods of low need. When demand peaks around dinner time, electricity can be withdrawn from the batteries instead of burning fossil fuels in a coal or gas-fired plant. Additional batteries can be installed to exactly match our need instead of building an expensive transmission line with more capacity than we may ever need.

Change and transition are not barred by Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan, but the hearing examiner and council must consider what kind of change is prudent.

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