

Village may give solar lights a try

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Officials say option could be less expensive than We Energies charge

If the price is right, solar-powered streetlights may line Belgium's Main Street when it is reconstructed by the Ozaukee County Highway Department in 2013.

The project, which could be delayed, is not far enough along to know what We Energies will charge for new streetlights, but solar-powered lights will certainly reduce utility bills, village officials said.

Last year, We Energies charged between \$2,500 and \$3,000 per light to re-install nine streetlights that were removed in 2009 to save money.

It cost the village \$2,750 a month to operate 110 streetlights owned by We Energies compared to \$80 per month for 40 decorative village-owned lights, Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said.

However, the decorative lights, which are used mostly in subdivisions, do not provide enough illumination for thoroughfares like Main Street and Royal Avenue, he said.

Solar streetlights are more expensive than the Public Safety Committee expected, so on April 19 the committee decided to explore more manufacturers before making a recommendation to the Village Board.

"I'm getting educated," Trustee Clem Gottsacker, chairman of the committee, said. "With the first solar company, I was optimistic, but now I'm not."

A Michigan company's solar streetlight costs \$3,000, but Birenbaum said the battery is not guaranteed when temperatures dip below 5 degrees Fahrenheit.

"That won't do in Wisconsin," he said.

A Canadian-built, solar-powered streetlight that works in sub-zero temperatures costs \$4,800. Its two \$300 batteries would have to be replaced every three to seven years, Birenbaum said.

Village President Richard Howells said that would still be less expensive than having We Energies install sodium streetlights. He suggested a solar-powered light be installed this year on a dark street to gauge its effectiveness and residents' reactions.

However, Trustee Vickie Boehnlein questioned if there is enough money in this year's budget to install a test light.

The committee also discussed installing a solar streetlight on Park Street, but learned residents are happy without the light.