

New electricity rates could be shocking

Ontario homeowners are going to be hard-hit by hikes in electricity costs within and possibly beyond the foreseeable future, according to various mainline news reports and comments on Monday's announcement of the Ontario Long-Term Energy Plan 2013.

But it's not entirely certain just how much it's going to hurt. Estimates of rising costs vary from 36% to 42%. The Sun chose 42% and published a chart which it said was sourced from the Plan.

The chart shows typical family costs of hydro starting at \$125 a month this year, rising to \$137 in 2014, and by about \$12 or \$13 a month until hitting \$205 monthly in 2030.

In the face of calls from Dufferin County and the townships for a moratorium on wind farm construction, the new plan is to seek proposals from wind companies to provide an additional 600 MW capacity over the next two years. That's equivalent to three times the capacity of the Melancton farms 133, 1.5 MW towers. It would be new proposals, in addition to those already contracted but yet to be approved or constructed, such as Dufferin Wind Power.

As expected, however, the Canadian Wind Energy Association (CanWEA) finds that a good thing.

In a news release Tuesday, the association quoted its president as saying, "We agree with the Government of Ontario that new wind energy is a good choice when new electricity supply is required and we look forward to working with the Government to finalize the details of the initial procurement in the first quarter of 2014. "Ontario's wind energy industry is well positioned to provide Ontario with cost competitive and affordable power through this process."

He added that, "Ontario must continue to pursue options that provide reliable electricity, stabilize electricity prices, promote community economic development and protect the environment. Wind energy has proven to be an increasingly favourable option for addressing these important public needs."

Melancton, apparently a windy township, will have something like 166 turbines within its boundaries if or when current plans come to fruition. The council is on record as saying it already has more than its share of the towers.

On Tuesday, Mayor Bill Hill hadn't had an opportunity to digest the new Ontario plan, so he declined to make any specific comment on it. "If you want a specific comment, my specific comment is 'no comment'," he said.

CanWEA wasn't alone in lauding the new plan.

In a news release Monday, Enbridge Gas Distribution said it "welcomes Ontario's Long Term Energy Plan (LTEP) and the opportunity to work with the Government and other stakeholders to help ensure that residents and businesses in the province continue to benefit from clean, affordable and reliable natural gas in the future."

Enbridge seized the opportunity to say that it has been part of the energy mix, and has been saving consumers money all along. "A typical residential customer purchasing natural gas supply from Enbridge Gas Distribution is currently saving about \$500 on their total annual natural gas bill compared to what they were paying five years ago," Enbridge said.

Enbridge didn't mention the government's cancellation of two gas plants, but Premier Kathleen Wynne is still trying to live down the political reasons for the cancellations under her predecessor, and the resulting costs to taxpayers "which might be a factor in the rising electricity costs."

By Wes Keller