



Legislation Text

File #: 23-1651, **Version:** 1

Resolution to Encourage DTE to Develop a Process for Burying Power Lines, Investing in Energy Infrastructure, and Improving Grid Reliability and Resilience
Whereas, DTE’s electric grid has repeatedly proven to be highly susceptible to severe weather events;

Whereas, The City of Ann Arbor has already experienced at least three severe weather events in 2023, on February 22, March 3, and July 26, resulting in widespread DTE grid failures and multi-day power outages in Ann Arbor and surrounding communities;

Whereas, A small-scale Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) case study from Beadle County, South Dakota in 1996 determined that burying the studied power line in a severe weather area “proved to be a good investment,” concluding that the underground line “would have paid for itself in just two damaging weather events.”;

Whereas, The FEMA case study noted that after the studied power line was buried, “storms continued with events that were severe enough to result in presidential disaster declarations for Beadle County in 2001, 2005, and 2007. But with the power lines buried four feet below the ground, neither these events nor others caused significant damage to the lines” and “a tornado in August 2006 resulted in no damage or disruption of service.”;

Whereas, The FEMA case study also noted that, “the cumulative cost of replacing [the power line] after each storm would have been far greater than the cost of burying it once.”;

Whereas, Another FEMA case study noted that for an Independence, Missouri municipal utility company - Independence Power and Light (IPL) - “removing power lines from utility poles and burying them underground is not just a matter of aesthetics; it’s also good business,” and “through mitigation grants, Independence Power and Light (IPL) buried power lines from distribution line poles to residential structures, proving that this tactic enhances power reliability, reduces property loss, and lessens risk to human life-and it saves money.”;

Whereas, This second case study also noted, “continuously reinstalling downed power lines, which resulted from several storms that toppled trees and snapped branches, did not make financial sense for the municipally owned company”;

Whereas, The City of Ann Arbor’s A2Zero Living Carbon Neutrality Plan identifies enhancing the resilience of our people and our place as a core strategy for responding to climate change, and cites a transition to underground power lines as a potential strategy based on the input of a diverse group of stakeholders, including technical experts, partner organizations, residents, and the general public;

Whereas, At the August 8, 2023 meeting of the Ann Arbor Energy Commission, a representative from DTE indicated, the company is “definitely pursuing underground opportunities where it makes

sense...to get some of the core infrastructure, the most important pieces...underground”;

Whereas, Despite previous reluctance to seriously collaborate on undergrounding energy infrastructure, DTE is now “very interested all the way at our executive level” in burying lines, particularly from the substations for “core parts of the circuit...that impacts the largest number of customers,” according to the representative;

Whereas, The DTE representative also stated that the company is “looking for partnerships with communities where you’re doing projects, if you’re doing a road project, that may overlay with work we need to do...that’s something we’re interested in,” noting “there could be significant cost savings for all parties”;

Whereas, A recent American Pulse survey of Ann Arbor residents clearly found that Resilience and Reliability were the top two most important energy-related priorities for community members;

Whereas, The City recognizes that there may be situations in which undergrounding in the right of way is infeasible, and that DTE should lead a discussion with the City and the public on where undergrounding would be feasible throughout Ann Arbor; and

Whereas, The City has joined with other local governments and the MPSC staff to advocate for DTE’s increased cooperation and participation in ongoing municipal planning and project execution to reduce costs and disruption;

RESOLVED, The Ann Arbor City Council directs the City Administrator to strongly encourage DTE to develop a plan to improve grid reliability and resilience through coordination with the City to upgrade and underground utility infrastructure, wherever possible, when the City is planning existing road or public service projects.

Sponsored by: Councilmember Radina, Mayor Taylor, and Councilmembers Ghazi Edwin, Briggs, Cornell, Disch, Harrison and Watson