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Aggregation News McHenry County

1 message

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County to vote on putting electric aggregation on ballot

By KEVIN P. CRAVER - kcraver@shawmedia.com

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The McHenry County Board will proceed with a referendum asking rural voters whether they want the county to seek lower electrical rates on their behalf.

A resolution asking unincorporated voters whether they want residents and small businesses to “aggregate” their residential and small-business accounts to shop competitively for electricity will be submitted to County Board next month for placement on the March 20 ballot. At least eight municipal governments already have done so or are discussing it.

The State’s Attorney’s Office is drafting the resolution language, County Administrator Peter Austin said earlier this week.

Barring a special meeting, it would go before the Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee on Dec. 8, and go before the full County Board at its Dec. 20 meeting. The deadline to put referendums on the March ballot is Jan. 3.

Committee members have been mulling a referendum since September, when Northern Illinois Municipal Electric Collaborative Executive Director David Hoover told them that residential customers could save an average of 23 percent on their electric bills if government bid out their electrical needs.

While legislative committee members have not yet officially voted on a referendum, they ordered county staff last month to prepare a request for qualifications for companies able to aggregate accounts, such as NIMEC. Proposals were opened Monday afternoon, Austin said.

One of the bid provisions will likely be to help pay for election material educating voters on the concept. State law limits the political activities of public bodies, which cannot advocate for or against a ballot question.

A county referendum would affect only its 70,000 or so unincorporated residents – not residents within municipal boundaries. If the referendum passes, any rural customer could choose to opt out and keep ComEd or his present provider.

Hoover told the full County Board last month that it may be able to

secure an annual fee from whichever power supplier they end up choosing, similar to its cable franchise agreement, should voters approve the referendum. While some members hesitantly supported the idea, others did not, with one calling the idea "pretty close to a bribe."

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