

## FAIRPORT MUNICIPAL COMMISSION

### *Last of three columns*

Perinton has seen significant growth over the last three decades, and Fairport Electric has had to keep up with that growth. Not only has the number of customers increased, but the amount of electricity used on the average by each household has quadrupled. Many more homes are completely electric, and are equipped with multiple television sets, computers, and other items that constantly draw electric current. The increased demand has created the need for expanded or upgraded facilities. A new receiving station was built on Hogan Road in 1977, which together with a newly expanded Vincent Lawler receiving station on Turk Hill Road receives power from the Niagara projects. In 2000 the Lawler plant was expanded again. The power comes in to those two receiving stations and is subsequently stepped down at five substations.

The Commission's agreement that was signed in 1996 with the New York State Power Authority to provide power was renewed in 2003 and will remain in effect until 2025. The Commission receives a fixed amount of electricity from hydropower while the remainder, termed incremental power, comes from other sources like nuclear or coal-fired facilities. The cost of the incremental power is twelve and one-half times the cost of the hydropower.

Despite expansion in customer base and demand, Fairport Electric has had two rate increases since 1988, one in 1993 and another in 2005. In 1993, the Commission inaugurated seasonal rates which charged more in the winter months, but reduced some rates during the summer months. Winter bills tend to reflect higher usage and consequently increased usage of the more expensive incremental power.

Because the challenge to Fairport Electric is to continue to provide adequate low-cost electricity into the future, conservation is encouraged. Just because Fairport Electric rates are low does not mean that the supply is endless or that it will always be cheap. In 1992 the "Watt Buster" program was initiated for those whose homes were 100% electric. Energy audits were available and customers could qualify for water heater blankets, pipe insulation and low-flow shower heads, all small but significant ways to conserve. At one point, the commission sponsored a refrigerator buy-back program with the goal of retiring old, inefficient ones. The Commission also began to provide rebates to customers who switch from electric to gas heat. The long-term goal is to limit the increase in usage because once the low-cost hydropower allotment is used, higher cost incremental power must be purchased.

The one hundred year old buildings on Lift Bridge Lane were replaced by a larger, up-to-date facility that was completed in 2003. The new buildings increased available space from 19,000 square feet to 39,000 square feet, providing room to map electric grids on computers, as well as more space for training and a 25 slot truck bay. The three brick-faced buildings complement the architectural design of the canal corridor. Other developments since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century include replacing existing residential meters with digital ones and gradually replacing and burying electric lines.

Members of the community are fortunate recipients of the wise decision made over 100 years ago to create a municipally-owned electric utility. Like the other 47 municipally-owned utilities in New York, and in an era of increasing population and increasing per household use of electricity, Fairport Electric continues to provide low rates and efficient service. Challenges for the future include keeping up with Perinton's growth, and keeping the current facilities, lines, poles, and transformers maintained. According to supervisor Mitch Wilke, however, the most important challenge, as well as the goal of those at Fairport Electric, will be to continue to provide the safest and lowest cost electricity possible.

A letter written in 1928 by Sam Jacobson hailed the benefits of a municipal power commission. In comparing electric bills, he noted that his electric bill was about 20% cheaper than those in neighboring towns. The cost of a street lamp was in Fairport was less than half of on in Newark, which

was served by a private utility. He spoke of the profits that return directly to the village for payment of debts and also for the purchase of such items as ornamental lights. Jacobson's statement that "The people of the village of Fairport should realize that they are shareholders in a paying corporation, a corporation that pays dividends each month, one that they control and serves them well." is as relevant today as it was in 1928.