

TO: Committee of the Whole - PU

FROM: Gary Holm

DATE: February 16, 2021

RE: Discussion
Decorative Painting of Electric Utility Distribution Equipment

For the better part of the past decade the City's Electric Utility has received numerous requests to allow its distribution equipment to be painted with decorative murals. The Utility has consistently denied these requests. The topic of painting murals has recently been brought forth again by Council members. This memo will outline why Staff continues to recommend against allowing decorative murals to be painted on the City's electrical distribution equipment.

Electrical distribution equipment in the United States is regulated by the National Electric Safety Code (NESC). There are no provisions within the NESC which specifically address the topic of decorative painting. The NESC specifies that electric shock warning labels should be displayed on equipment. As long as those warning labels are preserved, then there is no specific code prohibiting decorative painting. The topic of decorative painting is a matter of policy, not code.

Batavia Electric has historically followed the guidance of the Energy Education Council (EEC). Batavia is a member of EEC through its membership with the Illinois Municipal Utility Association. EEC first created its "Safe Electricity" public awareness campaign in 2001. The Safe Electricity campaign is designed to educate the public about the potential hazards of electric infrastructure. The campaign covers a variety of topics, including Outdoor Electrical Box Safety. Below is a link to Safe Electricity's six minute video about outdoor boxes. The video demonstrates why it is important to be cautious and respectful of electric infrastructure and why children should not be allowed to play around the boxes.

<https://safeelectricity.org/public-education/videos-library/outdoor-electrical-box-safety/>

While the City's green colored electrical distribution boxes may not be aesthetically pleasing, they do convey a consistent message to the public of potential hazards and the need to be respected. The consistently green color helps parents to educate their children that the boxes are not play things. Staff has been opposed to allowing the boxes to be painted with decorations. Staff feels that a box painted with pretty rainbows or colorful flowers is much more attractive to a child than a plain green box. Staff feels that children are more likely to play around and climb on a painted box than they would a plain green box.

Painting utility boxes has become a trendy thing to do. A quick Google search will reveal numerous communities that have utility box painting programs. Just to our south, the City of Aurora recently announced a box painting program for this upcoming summer. It should be noted that Aurora's program specifically relates to their city-owned traffic signal control cabinets. Aurora is served by ComEd and ComEd's electrical distribution boxes are not included in Aurora's program. For reference, traffic signal control cabinets are served at 120/240 volts. The City's transformer on Wilson St. adjacent to the

Boardway Shops is served at 7,200 volts. While both voltage levels can be dangerous, the higher voltage associated with distribution equipment generally represents a greater hazard.

As indicated above, the decorative painting of utility boxes is a matter of City policy. City Council has the discretion to allow boxes to be painted. Staff continues to recommend against any decorative box painting program.

One final note – this memo was written specifically in regards to the City's green electrical distribution boxes. The aluminum box on Wilson St. adjacent to the Boardwalk Shops is owned by IDOT. The aluminum box houses traffic signal control and interconnection equipment. Painting of the aluminum box would require permission from IDOT.